LITTLE SHIPS

Kathleen Norris

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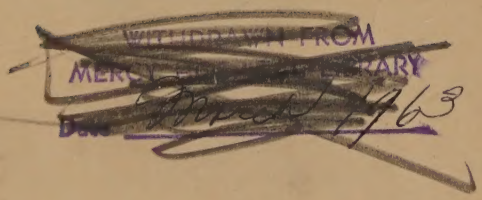
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LITTLE SHIPS

BOOKS

By Kathleen Norris

LITTLE SHIPS
NOON
ROSE OF THE WORLD
THE CALLAHANS AND THE MURPHYS
BUTTERFLY
CERTAIN PEOPLE OF IMPORTANCE
LUCRETIA LOMBARD
THE BELOVED WOMAN
HARRIET AND THE PIPER
SISTERS
JOSSELYN'S WIFE
UNDERTOW
MARTIE, THE UNCONQUERED
THE HEART OF RACHAEL
THE STORY OF JULIA PAGE
THE TREASURE
SATURDAY'S CHILD
POOR, DEAR MARGARET KIRBY
THE RICH MRS. BURGOYNE
MOTHER

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Little Ships

A Novel by

Kathleen Norris

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DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & CO.
GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
1925

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FIRST EDITION

To Frank with a Book

To be quite frank, then let me say
That since that first, remembered day
    That echoed to your baby screams,
    My quiet world, my peaceful schemes
Have trembled underneath your sway.

My typewriters have gone astray,
Pencils are broken, paste is grey,
    And ink escapes in blots and streams,
        To be quite frank.

Yet no one else has quite your way,
No one may take, try though he may
    Your place in all your mother's dreams.
    —Though all are dear, none other seems
        To be quite Frank.

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LITTLE SHIPS

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CHAPTER I

IT WAS the last hour of the long three days' "Retreat" in the old Mission Convent of St. Elizabeth, in San Francisco; Mollie Cunningham had almost exhausted herself with prayer. She could still kneel, almost sitting on her heels as she did so; she could still keep devout eyes upon the sunshine-flecked, candle-lighted, smoke-veiled haze of flowers and golden colours that was the chapel altar. But she was weary, smiling dreamily, like a tired child unnoted in the corner of a father's room. Benediction was in progress.

Her final prayer, so accustomed as to rise to her lips automatically now, was for the children.

Mollie had five living children "and two angels." Sown in among the joyous healthy cares and joys of her motherhood were the agonies of a double loss. George, taken from her after only a few wailing weeks of life, would be seventeen now. Daisy, a silken-headed blossom of three, had died ten years ago. The world had forgotten everything except that, vaguely, there had been a Cunningham baby or two who had not lived. But Mollie kept George's and Daisy's anniversaries ever green in her heart. "I hope they pray for Mama!" she often said.

She turned her thoughts to-day to the others—the five sturdy, bold, and black-eyed children who remained.

For Tom, twenty-two years old and the first-born, her prayers were filled with fear and pride. Tom had graduated from the Santa Clara College, and was beginning his business career with Papa, in the big wholesale grocery firm of P. J. Cunningham & Co.

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Tom was everything that was wonderful, his mother thought: handsome, witty, good, with the voice of a seraph. But Mollie was a little afraid just now that he was beginning to fancy his pretty, giddy, penniless cousin, Kate Walsh.

"Don't let him marry Kate," was her somewhat vague prayer for him. "She's a good enough little thing, and my own half-brother's child, but I want that the boy should look higher than that—he'll be rich some day, and if he could, travel in Europe, and then maybe come home and be his Mama's boy."

Cecilia came next in line. Cecilia, just nineteen, was kneeling beside her mother, her slender little back very straight, her white chip hat, wreathed with pink roses, bowed devoutly over her linked fingers. Nineteen! Mollie could hardly believe that one of her little girls was nineteen, a grown-up young lady, talking about a religious vocation.

For Cecilia, in her own angelic little heart, was sure that she wanted to become a nun, right here in the dear old convent where all her happy school days had been spent. Her father was distinctly opposed to this idea, and even Mollie, although she loved the nuns, and had a proud and tender feeling toward the pious aspirations of her good little daughter, was not quite ready to pray that Cecy should "enter."

She prayed instead that the child should be "guided." If a good marriage should come along, with some fine man, Mollie knew that she would be better pleased. "Not a poor struggling feller that had risen up from nothing, like Jawn Kelly," Mollie mused, but perhaps someone who would give the child a taste of better things, society and art, travel. "Or at least," thought Mollie, vaguely, "if she had a beau or two, that she'd know what she'd be doing in offering it all up, and becoming a Sister!"

Then came Martin, the third of the children, wild, clumsy, dirty, at fifteen—the odd member of the little group. His mother could not think of Martin as particularly interesting, let him do what he would with his life. To-day she merely asked God to "make a good man of him," before her prayers reached little excitable Ellen, nine, whose fond father loved to say that

bones and freckles and tears and temper and pug-nose and all, Ellen would turn into "a grand woman."

"If Ellen made a good marriage, and made it early," her mother thought. "Maybe with some older man—for she'll never have looks, that one! She'd no more make a nun than Mart would a priest, although I'd love to have one priest out of my three boys!"

But of Paul, the adored five-year-old, the baby of the family, Mollie knew herself not courageous enough to ask for a priest. Paul was her darling, the last baby, and the baby who had come so much after the others, after the loss of George and Daisy, after Tom was a "big feller in college."

Paul must always be his mother's boy; she would carry him in her arms past all the sorrows and uglinesses of life, if she could. Tom had already shocked her with a coarse schoolboy joke, a coarse schoolboy attitude, now and then, and Cecy more than once, in the years before this present religious stage of her development had commenced, had read some book disapproved by her mother.

But Paul—no! The baby purity of her last-born child was strangely dear to Mollie, and to-day she prayed that Paul might never in the course of all his life commit a mortal sin.

The tears were in her eyes when the organ began softly to send the strains of the "Laudate Dominum" through the warm, sweet air, and everybody stood up, with great rustling and scraping. Two hundred women, worldlings and nuns, got to their feet, and stood facing for a few minutes the little altar with its candles twinkling bravely in a blaze of baffled afternoon light.

Sunlight was battering against the drawn shades of the western windows. It was warm in the chapel, and the air was sweet and heavy with lilies. The big Paschal candle was lighted, but there was no breath of air moving to stir the tiny, ineffectual flame. The walls were of polished golden oak, the pews of golden oak, and the altar rail. The shining wood, the lights, the spotless order seemed to capture a sort of unearthly radiance, here in this little prayerful oasis in the very heart of the city.

The souls of the praying women were quite drenched with its beauty, their simple hearts were filled to the brim with felicity, as the twinkling monstrance was raised, and the thick, sweet, choking incense drifted in great blue clouds from the censer. They stumbled to their feet for the "Laudate" quite bewildered with exaltation.

From the rear came the straining notes of a tiny organ, the feeble voices of several nuns. St. Elizabeth's had no fine voice this year, like dear Sister Gertrude's last year. How that heavenly voice had inspired them all in many a wonderful retreat!

Mollie Cunningham sat back upon the hard narrow seat with some creaking of stays, some audible shortness of breath. Mollie was stout. She glanced sidewise, with a significant smile at Cecilia's still bowed head, at her own sister, Maggie Walsh. Maggie had made the retreat, as well as a busy dressmaker could, with Mollie and Cecilia.

Well, it was over. To-night they would have still to keep silence, of course. There would be Mass here at the convent to-morrow morning at eight, and afterward a jubilee breakfast, when the silence would be broken at last. But the retreat was practically over.

Mrs. Cunningham and her sister Maggie Walsh tried to make the retreat every year. This was the first time Cecilia had been with them. She had been a schoolgirl at this time last year. The presence of Cecilia's pure youth and beauty in these three solemn days of lectures, prayers, and spiritual reading had been a great joy to her mother and her aunt, and according to the nuns, an "edification" to others as well. More than one devout woman, moving thoughtfully down the garden paths, at "recreation," had smiled significantly at Mollie. "That lovely little Cunningham girl has got a vocation!" the whisper went round.

Cecilia had, at all events, made a good retreat. There was something unearthly about her "recollection." She had listened to the lectures, read a book about Lourdes, the "Little Flower," and Montalembert's "Saint Elizabeth"; she had been the first to reach the chapel, the last to leave. Almost

invariably her mother had had to await her lovingly, as she was awaiting her now.

The chapel slowly emptied. The delicate rustling of silks, and the chip-chip of women's feet, and certain subdued whispers, could be heard in the hall. These worldly visitors knew that the smooth convent routine was claiming the nuns again, as a clear bell struck three times, and was silent, in some place unseen.

"Sister Bertrand!" breathed Maggie Walsh, who prided herself upon her intimate knowledge of things conventual. Three bells was for Sister Bertrand, was it? Mrs. Cunningham answered, with a serious nodding of her head.

Her big deep bosom, in its heavy silk, rose and fell upon a sigh. If Cecilia would but end her orisons, her mother reflected innocently, they would get downstairs in good season, and scores of retreatants would see the Cunninghams getting into their motor-car. Few women had automobiles waiting for them.

The sunset blazed angrily against the drawn shades. A street-car whined by, the motorman's bell ding-donging, and a light sunset wind sang in a hot minor key about the big building.

Almost everybody had left the chapel, a nun was practising on the organ, some other nun humming faintly in accord. One or two young postulants, with sober, plain, ecstatic young faces, their braided hair showing through coarse black net veils, had slipped into their stalls and were praying; and poor Lizzie Prendergast, who was "scrupulous," was weeping into her gnarled red hands in a front pew. Everyone knew that Lizzie had wanted to become a nun thirty years ago, but her father wouldn't let her, and her mother had cancer. Now Lizzie at fifty, with a very passion for retreats, was "scrupulous," a tearful, grateful picker at the crumbs that fell from the children's table.

Mollie looked at Lizzie, and then at Cecilia's firm, sweet, fragrant youth, and a wave of gratitude flooded her heart. How beautiful life was to be for the child!

And as if Cecilia felt the motherly look, she suddenly sat back, smiled dewily and dazedly at her aunt and her mother, and they all came out together from the chapel. They went out the side

door by the Joseph altar, glancing seriously at Lizzie as they came.

"Well for me if I had Lizzie Prendergast's record, when my time comes!" said Mollie, downstairs. "She's a saint if ever there was one!"

"Lizzie ain't the only one," said Maggie Walsh, with a glance at Cecilia, and a kindly smile. Maggie was lean, florid, shabby, grey, where her sister was plump, pale, richly dressed, and without a single grey thread in the thick black satin of her hair, yet the sisters were oddly alike in some subtle way, physically, and very close in spirit.

Cecilia looked quickly, deprecatingly, almost in protest, at her aunt, but her honest, lovely little face, with its blue eyes and black lashes, its healthy rosiness powdered with golden freckles, its small straight nose, wide mouth, and youthful, innocent brow, flushed happily.

She did not speak. Cecilia had moments, and this was one, of being extremely conscientious about keeping silence during these days. She did not even avail herself of the permission to discuss "spiritual matters, or those of necessity."

The women who were drifting down the big, clean oak stairs were, however, less self-controlled. They were murmuring of meditations, lectures and litanies, as they filtered away into the noise and dirtiness and glare of the May streets. The old Mission streets of San Francisco, in the grip of the western sun, looked soiled and dingy.

A little nun attended them to the doorway, and opened the big grey door that gave upon a flight of wide grey steps into a bare, orderly garden. Her hands lost in her big sleeves, she stood smiling them out, without speaking. As the Cunningham party came down, another nun, tall and decisive in movement, swooped from an adjoining parlour, and spoke to them affectionately.

"You'll be prompt to-morrow, Mollie?" she said.

"Indeed I will, Sister Aloysius!" answered Mollie, glad to speak under such irreproachable auspices. "Indeed it's all I

can do to get me little ger'rl out of the chapel at all!" she added, with a loving glance for the radiant Cecilia.

The nun looked at once wise and simple, merry and grave, as only nuns and children can look. She put her arm about the girl.

"Some day you'll give her to us to keep, Mollie," she prophesied, cheerfully. "Sister Veronica and I have had our eyes on her all these years. Indeed," the religious went on, seriously, "Good Mother was just saying that we've never had a retreat yet without at least one vocation!"

"It's been my intention, this whole retreat!" Cecilia said, in a sudden burst of emotion.

Her tone, all youthful faith and fire, filled her mother's eyes with tears.

"I don't know what her papa'd say, she's the very apple of his eye!" Mollie faltered.

"Ah, if Our Lord wants her, he'll have to give her to us!" the nun said, gaily.

"Indeed, *I'd* give her gladly," Mrs. Cunningham said, stirred by a sudden feeling of her own. The peaceful days of prayer, the love she felt for this big school where some of her own happy young days had been passed, the sense of wealth and power her big waiting car—visible now at the gate—always gave her, impelled her toward some act of dramatic generosity. "We'll pray for it, Sister," she encouraged. "And while you're about it," she added, "you might pray that her father'll give you that big lot with her—he's not one to have her come to you empty-handed!"

She nodded her head as she spoke toward the big corner lot that bounded the convent property on the southwest. The thought had come full-fledged into being. Mollie had never before actually put together the two facts of Cecilia's vocation and her father's ownership of this particular piece of property.

She was a little frightened at her own daring, a little apprehensive, when she saw the sudden surprised expression in the nun's eyes.

"Mollie, does Mr. Cunningham own that lot?" Sister Aloysius asked, quickly.

"He does indeed," Mollie answered, with an uneasy smile.

"Glory be to the everlasting goodness of God," said the nun, simply, in a low tone, her eyes rapt and her hand moving automatically in a blessing. "He knows better than ourselves what are our needs!" she said, as if to herself. "Mollie, may I tell Good Mother that,—just what you have told me?" she asked, in an undertone, as other groups of women, coming out, moved about them. "She has been so concerned about larger quarters, and we hardly know which way to turn," she added. "We have been praying to 'soften the heart of whoever owned that big lot'," she ended, with a deeply humorous smile. "Little did we dream it was good Mr. Cunningham!"

"Indeed you may!" Cecilia agreed, eagerly, for her mother.

Mollie experienced a horrible sensation of sinking within. The full potentialities of her indiscretion could not rush upon her at once, but she felt distinctly apprehensive.

"Well, will her papa ever give his consent that she should be a nun or not I don't know," she began, dubiously.

"About that," said the nun, leaving them with a smiling nod, "we must wait to discover the will of God!"

She was gone, and there was nothing for Mrs. Cunningham to do but accompany her sister and daughter down to the waiting motor-car. Maggie had indeed preceded her, and was chatting subduedly with Agnes Haley, in the sunset's red light beside the automobile. Mollie thought, with annoyance, that maybe Agnes expected a lift home.

Agnes, however, departed hastily, remarking merely that she had to "get bread for Kitty," and the Cunninghams seated themselves upon the pale buff cushions and started for Maggie's home, the Walsh family homestead in Turk Street. But at Maggie's first word all the spiritual glow and peace departed from Mrs. Cunningham's heart.

"Is Pete going to give the nuns that big lot if Cecilia goes in?" Maggie demanded. And Mrs. Cunningham, nettled and disturbed, spent some moments in belittling the idea, with a fine

air of negligence and indifference, and several more moments in analyzing mentally just what she had said to Sister Aloysius in that unfortunate moment of expansion and imagination.

"What possessed me!" she asked herself, in alternate panic and calm.

"Papa'd be a saint if he gave them that big lot!" Cecilia suddenly burst forth.

"I didn't say he would, I said he *might*," Mollie reminded her. "You better say nothin' about it——"

"Mother, if a person had a vocation, and kept putting it off, would they lose it?" the girl presently demanded.

"Not if they were very young, darling," her mother answered, tenderly.

"I'm nineteen," Cecilia offered, simply.

"You're a child," her mother assured her. Nineteen! Her little baby girl!

"Kate has a head on her like a man," Maggie Walsh put in, without warning, in her somewhat heavy, downright voice. Kate was an orphaned niece who lived with her, and there was a natural rivalry between the beautiful and protected Cecilia and the less fortunate Kate. Maggie was always ready to speak in Kate's defence. "She passed the civil service examinations third out of forty-seven," stated Maggie.

This had occurred some months previously, and had been thoroughly discussed not once but a hundred times. So Mollie made no comment, and Cecilia, when she spoke, was miles away.

"Saint Julia Falconieri took her vows when she was only fourteen," she remarked, dreamily. Nobody spoke in answer.

The motor turned into drab streets lined with wooden houses, and stopped before the Walsh home, a grimy, grey, bay-windowed cottage with a half-flight of peeled, discoloured steps rising from the street to the parlour floor, over basement windows and a garden path edged with inverted stout bottles.

There were geraniums upon jointed, shabby stalks, fuchsias, roses with speckled dry leaves, marguerites, in the garden and against the fence, and all along the neighbouring fences was

blown a sunburned litter of newspapers, chaff and rubbish, stirring restlessly now in the fitful wind.

The windows were draped with sodden Nottingham lace curtains, in the centre pane was a large white card upon which was painted, in flowing black script, the words: "*Walsh. Modes.*" Maggie carried on her dark and unsuccessful labours in the front parlour.

Mrs. Cunningham's eye, moving in some dissatisfaction over the familiar scene of what had been her own home many years before, detected another, smaller sign, over the bell. This was also familiar, but intermittent. It read "*Rooms and Board.*"

"Did that feller go?" she asked, as one who knew and who felt a distaste for the answer.

Maggie nodded dispiritedly.

"We'll get another," she predicted, somewhat lifelessly. "Come in and see Ma, Mollie?"

"I can't, I've got to get home. I'll be in to-morrow," Mrs. Cunningham answered, sighing. And Maggie, with no further attempt at persuasion, turned away.

"I guess Kate's home—I guess she's getting dinner started," said she, seeing lights in the rear windows. Cecilia had a shuddering vision of the scene within: its shabbiness, its sordidness, its poverty; the grizzled uncles waiting like big helpless seacows for their supper; the old grandmother dozing; Kate young and strong and beautiful, slamming plates and pots about.

Maggie, grey, greyly clad, middle-aged, disappeared in the grey twilight at the top of the dingy flight of grey stairs, and the Cunningham car moved briskly down the block, and turned, with a quite conscious brightening and quickening, toward the mellower airs, the prettier streets, the tree-shaded dooryards of the Mission.

Twilight was kindly here; there were big shaggy eucalyptus trees in the neighbourhood, through which the last sunlight was sending soft, warm colours; there were pampas grasses, roses, border pinks in the stately Cunningham garden.

The Cunningham mansion was set in handsome lawns, bulwarked some eight feet above the level of Howard Street by a

substantial stone bulkhead. Through this bulkhead, in front, rose a flight of broad, easy steps from the street; on top of the bulkhead ran a pretentious fence of iron filigree against which nicely tended and watered bushes and shrubs were ranged.

Between them the cement path ran at an easy slant up to the house, a double house, with wide, comfortable bay windows on each side of the big, deeply vestibuled front door. The doorway was of mahogany, a fact that never escaped the proud consciousness of its owners as they came and went, and the glass in the bay windows was plate.

The mansion faced the southwest, and the last light lay against the heavily draped lace and rep curtains of the best parlour and the billiard room, and through upper bay windows penetrated into the pleasant big front bedrooms upstairs that were Mrs. Cunningham's and the girls' rooms and into the little chapel, that was between them, directly over the front door.

For the sun lingered much later, and came much earlier, here in the Mission, and the last of its rays were just disappearing when Cecilia and her mother dismounted at the side door. The car, and the truculent old red-headed driver who was known only as "Kane," swept up the brick-paved driveway toward the stable quarters in the rear, and the Cunninghams, mother and daughter, went in the side door.

Within were immense space, richness, and comfort. Everything was orderly, darkened, quiet. Mollie Cunningham never got used to the joy of finding it so; Bessy, in her cap and apron, silently but smilingly admitting them, a card or two on the silver tray, a fire glowing in the living-room grate, and all the beloved rugs, carpets, curtains, heavily upholstered chairs, enormous, heavy tables, lamps, brass coal-buckets, immense framed pictures, life-sized statues of Neapolitan girls and white marble nymphs in Carrara veils, in place.

To tread the thick carpets was to walk in an enchanted land to her; to realize that prosperity, comfort, beauty reigned here, and that she reigned over it all, was an unceasing joy. She had almost a generous feeling of shame when her friends saw the house for the first time. If even to her it always seemed so

marvellous, what must it be to unaccustomed eyes! When Mollie brought home a friend, from a Lenten lecture, or from the Francesca sewing society, she was always especially simple and informal; she moved through her house naturally and briskly, the friend might easily suppose her totally unconscious of its greatness.

But she was thrilling with the acute sense of it, nevertheless. And to her, as to all Cunninghams, the one subject never to be treated lightly, frivolously, or as a joke, was the house. What it had cost, what had inspired its general features, how long the building had taken, and what the comments of press and public had been, when at last, upon its splendid eminence, it had been finished, were always fruitful and favourite themes of conversation. Mollie Walsh Cunningham had been a poor girl, a school-teacher. Peter Cunningham, reaching New York via the steerage, at seven, had known bitter years of want and discouragement before drifting westward to prosperity, his wife, his home, and his present position.

To-night there was apparently nobody downstairs except the light-footed Bessy, who disappeared immediately into her own region of large silver tea-pots, tick-tocking clocks, and dining-room gloom. Mrs. Cunningham, loosening her bonnet-strings as she went, mounted the immense, square stairway that was lighted by a high, coloured window, and yawned unaffectedly.

A little girl of nine, thin, babyish, and homely, came down the stairs to meet her mother, by a tortuous process of crab-like movements, her thin arms hooked over the wide balustrade and her feet caught in between the columns of it.

"I ain't touchin' the ground a-tall!" this child announced, shrilly, without a glance at her mother, toward whom her hooped little back was indeed completely turned. Her straight, lifeless hair was drawn over her outstanding ears in two lanky pigtails, and her face, as Mrs. Cunningham captured her, and restored her position to the normal, was flushed and protestant.

"Don't do that, Ellen dear, you'll get yourself giddy!" the mother said, indulgently disapproving.

"Aw—I was haffway down—aw, I can do it better than Baby!" shouted Ellen, in an ear-piercing voice.

"Oh, for heaven's *sake*," Cecilia murmured, passing her mother and sister with only one patient sigh, and going on to her own room.

"Are the boys home, lovey?" Mrs. Cunningham asked her youngest daughter.

"Tom is," sing-songed Ellen, "Martin is—Martin was in a fight, and he bit Leo Kennedy, and Joe Kennedy said that Mart was a dirty sneak. And he *is* a dirty sneak, Mother," Ellen added with conviction, now hopping along beside her mother, with such occasional clutches at the stout, elderly form, as almost upset Mrs. Cunningham's balance as well as her own. "You oughtn't bite boys when you fight them," ruled Ellen, eagerly. "Father Moran came out, and he saw them fighting, and he said that they were like the beasts of the field, and Rose Cahill and me ran home, and I guess he——"

"Did ye hear about the baby, Mollie?"

A gaunt, thin, haggard-eyed woman, with a perfectly colourless face dotted with large brown freckles, had intercepted their progress across the wide, twilight space of the upper hall. Her tone was indifferent, patient, resigned, and touched with a distinct whine.

"Between us and harm—what's happened?" demanded Mollie Cunningham, her healthy colour fading, and her full, soft hand clutching her own bosom, as all her maternal fears, never long dormant, sprang into throbbing life again. Her eyes roved apprehensively toward the nursery door, some feet behind her informant.

"Well, nothin'," hastily said the gaunt woman, with something like a faint apology in her tone, "but he run home from school—the size of him! Mindju, alone—he come flyin' in. I thought poor Annie would die on me with the shock!"

"The baby—he run them five blocks alone, and over the crossings—well, deliver us all!" Mrs. Cunningham said, impressed. "The poor nuns must have been scared out of their

wits when they missed him!" she said, in her large, splendidly furnished room now, and laying aside her formal attire. She began to button herself into a soft, baggy old blue sateen, figured in grey, with a high, hooked collar neatly finished with ruching, and enormous limp baggy sleeves.

"Oh, I sent Annie on the run up there, to tell them he was at home," the other woman said. She seated herself with a sigh, in a large chair, but without any effect of comfort or relaxation. Rather she perched upon its edge, holding her lean, flat body erect, as if duty might at any instant claim her. "Well," she said, sighing again, "I guess you're having a grand retreat."

The dreary tone died away into silence; Mrs. Cunningham, if she heard, did not answer. Allie Cunningham, her husband's sister, was a natural fact in her life; no conversational effort was demanded by Allie. Mollie looked at her complacent, handsome self in the large mirror of the enormous walnut bureau, pinned upon her ample bosom, with a bow-knot of tiny pearls, a handsome gold watch; pulled the fingers of her gloves thoughtfully, and blew into them before laying them in a grey satin box upon which a pair of brown gloves, carelessly flung down, had been painted in oil.

All the furniture in the room was large: there were two tremendous walnut wardrobes, a washstand upon which stood a handsome china pitcher decorated in gold and colours, and the corresponding basin and cups and tooth-mug, a sewing-table, a whatnot, various chairs, one of them a patent rocker on a heavy pedestal, and an enormous bed, smoothly white, with a foot of machine-cut walnut, and a high back decorated in mill-work scrolls, with dots, dashes, slanting lines, leaves, wheels and scallops wherever they could be crowded in. Two flat thin pillows and two erect fat ones were at the head of the bed; it was flawless, plump, firm, it was a work of art, demolished and repeated daily.

At the windows were rep draperies drawn stiffly back in heavily tasselled bands, under which stiff Nottingham lace curtains were neatly arranged. All the curtains depended from great frames which in their turn were covered with rep and gimp.

The floor was covered from baseboard to baseboard with beautiful Moquette, a pattern of roses and ribbon upon a pearly background.

Adjoining was a large, dark bathroom with a wooden lattice laid upon the floor beside the wooden-framed tin tub, for the safety and convenience of bathers, and a washstand of darkly mottled brown marble. There was a tall window in this bathroom, but against it the dark inside shutters were invariably drawn. Mollie Cunningham had been born in a home where running water in itself was a luxury; she and her husband had a bathroom in their new house, of course, indeed they had been much discussed by their own small circle when it was built, because they had two bathrooms. But in the twenty years of their tenancy here they had used it perhaps not quite as many times.

The handsome washstands, with their odorous soaps and fringed towels, the comforting pitcher of hot water, the sense of compactness and normality, were nearer the ideal of both, where ablutions were concerned, than was this roomy apartment with its tub, this necessity for complete disrobing, with its accompanying feeling of helplessness, of being caught at a disadvantage, this embarrassing redressing from the very beginning of shirt and stockings.

Mollie always "washed" at night, turning her clothes down over the tops of her corsets, soaping her fresh, full neck and rinsing and spattering conscientiously. And Pete puffed and blew, and groped for his towel, and soused his thick shock of grizzled black curls every morning. There was always much slopping and sputtering; the splasher behind the stand was always scarred with little flights of flying drops and the big slop-jar was usually filled and showed a floating scum of grey suds when Ida or Grace came in to clean the room at nine o'clock. But the bathrooms were principally for display; it was wonderful to have them, used or not.

And of course the young persons of the family did use them, or did use the one that opened out of the nursery. Cecilia had of late begun a quite noticeable fashion of bathing; odd nights,

even occasionally in the mornings. Her brothers, content with Saturday-night scrubbings, somewhat joked her about it.

Mollie's closet was enormous, but she used the wardrobes by preference. The big room opposite hers was occupied by Cecilia and Ellen, the other children had large back rooms. Next her was the chapel, an interior room, between the two big front bedrooms, small, dark, impressive. There were two upholstered little benches and several *pries-dieu* placed neatly on the shining, slippery floor; there was a large crucifix half visible in the gloom; pictures, a small empty altar, gold candlesticks, and before a graceful, blue-wrapped statue of the Blessed Virgin a lighted wick floated in a red glass tumbler.

From the upper hallway a second large flight of stairs ascended. There were six rooms on this floor, and six more in the mansard above. Some of them on the third floor were unused, two or three unfurnished; the Cunningham children used to play about in them during rainy days, as proud as their parents were of the spacious emptiness and the superfluity of room.

CHAPTER II

WHILE his mother was changing her street attire for dinner, Tom Cunningham, twenty-two years old, and the first-born, came loitering in. Tom had finished schooling with the Jesuits in Santa Clara, and was beginning work under his father in the family firm. He was everything an eldest son may, and should, be: handsome, merry, clever, good, devoted. Tom's father and mother sometimes said of him that they had never had a bad word or a dirty look out of him.

Tom was not unusually tall, as Mart, the fifteen-year-old brother was. But he was a good height, broad, dark, with thick black eyebrows, thick black curls covering his head like a close cap, dark, rich lashes, hard red cheeks, skin as white as a girl's, fine big teeth that showed when he laughed noisily, as he was always laughing, and square hands, hirsute and capable. He had a deep voice, a splendid laugh, and he could be funnier, the family thought, than any one else in the world.

"Hello, Mollie," he said, impudently, to his mother, kissing her milk-white forehead whence the black curly hair sprang thickly, still damp from recent dressing, "do you think you have the true vocation?"

"Hello, darlin'," responded his mother, mildly, her look of blind adoration tempered with anxious inspection. "Is Papa home?"

"He's downstairs. Ellen's bedevilling him into something. Well, are you still keeping the holy custody of the tongue, or can you talk to a feller?" asked Tom.

His mother and his aunt exchanged an indulgent look. Tom was a terror, said their proud eyes.

"Well, I can talk about matters of necessity or of holiness,"

his mother said, obviously quoting. Tom gave a shout of delight.

"Necessity or holiness—oh, my God!" he repeated, joyously.

"Don't talk that way, Tom," his mother protested. "You'd think you were mocking the nuns!"

"Well, Aunt Allie and I aren't strong on retreats, are we, Aunt Allie?" Tom said, sunk luxuriously into a chair, and watching his mother as she finished her toilette and closed bureau drawers.

"I don't know why we wouldn't be," Allie Cunningham said, with a deep sigh, and in a faintly resentful tone. "I don't know anything that would be grander," she added, enviously, "than to sit there at the Sisters', and have all the time in the world for your prayers and your own soul. I don't know—maybe I'll lose my own, in the end, if the truth was to be known," she rambled bitterly on, of her soul; "it's hardly time I have for my decade—I've lost my Crozier beads—— 'Do you think I wouldn't like to sit around with all you girls, doing nothin'?' I said to Ag Haley, after Mass on Sunday. 'Dear me, you must think I'm very fond of managin' to market, and quarrellin' with them the way they won't pass off any high meat on me!' I says. 'I'm not so fond of runnin' Pete's house as all that.' Did you see Maggie, how is she?" concluded Aunt Allie, still in a dull monotone, and with no change of expression.

Mrs. Cunningham had not been extremely attentive; she was reading a letter that had been placed upon her bureau. Tom was smoking a cigarette, and had picked up a magazine.

"The Sisters in Oakland are going to have an Easter Bazaar," said Mollie, with interest. "Yes, I saw Maggie, she come in for Benediction," she added. "She says Mrs. Rose sent the children's dresses back on her, and says she won't take them. I never heard of such a thing!"

"For heaven's sake!" ejaculated Aunt Allie.

"Maggie says the material was spotted before she ever cut into it—they're lovely little dresses, and I don't know why children couldn't wear them very well, for school, with their coats," Mrs. Cunningham reasoned, mildly. "You'd hardly see the

spots—and you with an opera glass turned on them! Poor Mag, she has the bad luck," she finished, sighing and shaking her head.

"Well, I'd see she took 'em, and paid for them, or I'd have the police after her!" Miss Cunningham said, hotly. "There's never a child that doesn't spot a dress the first time it's on, anyway!" In Aunt Allie's character there were tremendous forces, denied and aborted, and always ready to rise. She tortured herself with angry dissertations as to what she would do were she a mother, were she a wife, were she a priest, were she the President or the Archbishop. She listened to sermons in physical quiet but with a boiling heart and a truculent eye. She cast an embittered glance at her brother, when he discussed the children's lessons, at the dinner-table; and to blooming and joyous Mollie, who had married this adored brother twenty-three years ago, she had directed a gnawing jealousy, a furious loyalty, and a nagging anxious criticism during all this long and vital time.

Nothing annoyed Aunt Allie as much as praise of Mollie and Mollie's children, unless it might be blame of them. Lean, unhappy, dyspeptic, she managed the house; fretting, carping, comparing, and envying, during serene and sunshiny days, but a veritable tower of strength and courage when calamity came. Aunt Allie was like a harp of one rich chord, and that chord was bereavement.

"Lissun, Mom, lissun," Tom said, aggrieved by her inattention.

"I am, darlin'," his mother assured him. "Go on, dear!"

"These pictures," Tom resumed an ignored theme readily, "they all run eight times slower, do you see? So that when a feller jumps into the bay, he just rises slowly up in the air like a bird—it's the darnedest thing! His arms sorter spread out—but the dog was the keenest! Lifting up one foot and then the other——!"

"For heaven's sake!" Mrs. Cunningham said, absently. "I don't know how would they do that, unless they have the poor feller on ropes," she added, mildly.

"Oh, Mama, for God's sake!" Tom said, patiently. "Didn't I just tell you that all they do is run it slower?"

"Like the magic-lantern your papa gave Mart when he was thirteen," elucidated Aunt Allie, sepulchrally. "You could put two plates in!"

"No, not like that at all!" Tom ejaculated, almost in a shout. "You know as well as I do the films are on a sorter *spool*——"

"What would they have them on a spool for? Don't pitchers come on little glass slabs?" his mother asked, in genuine bewilderment, as he paused helplessly.

"Oh, Lord!" said Tom, dropping his elbows upon his knees, and sinking his black curly head in his hands. "Cis, tell Mom about the pictures we saw at the Orpheum," he requested, as his sister, with a small black book in her hand, came into the room.

Cecilia, fresh and trim, ready for dinner, her beautiful eyes dewy, smiled upon him gently.

"I'm in retreat, Tom," she reminded him, monitorially. And mildly and softly she said to their mother: "Mother, if Aunt Allie'll take me, might I go down to the Jesuits' to-night? They're having Vespers."

"Well, if your father doesn't mind——" Mrs. Cunningham began, somewhat worried because Tom, with a snort, had abruptly left the room. "I should think, retreat or no retreat, you could speak a little more kind to your brother," she rebuked Cecilia, gently.

The girl's sensitive face flushed, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Well, but, Mother—not about the *Orpheum!*" she stammered. Reproach from her mother was rare enough to seem an actual calamity to Cecilia.

"I know, but you've got to think of your brother," Mrs. Cunningham, weary and hurried, persisted, as she followed Tom. "If a boy's home isn't made attractive to him——"

She went out, and Cecilia said, in a little pettish burst, to Aunt Allie:

"A person wants to become a nun, and give her *entire life* to God, and then their brothers act so selfish and worldly! Tom

Cunningham will be sorry enough when I'm gone, and he only has Ellen to be his sister!"

"Indeed, the nuns have great trials of their own," said Miss Cunningham, unencouragingly. "There's many a one I've seen with red eyes on her! Don't think you can run away from the troubles of the world so easy, you'll find plenty everywhere! When I was eighteen"—she added in a high, sarcastic tone—"oh, indeed, I was going to enter, and it was all so easy and pleasant, and then my brother, your Uncle George, was took with cancer of the face, and my poor mother——!"

Aunt Allie sighed. No need to review the details; Cecilia had heard them a hundred times.

"No, I've given my life to my family—small thanks I get for it," she said, darkly. "But the girls that entered—they haven't had it all roses, either. A nun told me long ago, 'Alice,' she says, 'don't think we're any different just because we put on habits. Not at all, dear,' she says. 'Human hearts are just the same, and human faults, too!' I've often thought of her—she died soon after."

"Ah, Aunt Allie," said Cecilia, with her loving laugh, as she laid her blooming face for a moment against the leathery, colourless skin, and embraced her aunt with a slender arm, "you're so funny! Of course they're not any different, except that God sends them even *harder* trials than He sends people in the world; they *ask* for them. You don't think I want to enter to escape from *trials*, do you?"

"I don't believe your papa will ever consent that you should enter at all," Miss Cunningham suggested, unencouragingly. Cecilia laughed exultantly.

"He'd give me to the first rich young man that asked for me, fast enough!" she said, without resentment. "Pearl Ryan went in on New Year's Eve. Her father never knew a thing but what she was engaged to Stan Richards, and they were having a party, and the worst of it was that Stan and the two Ryan boys took too much punch——"

Miss Cunningham, descending the big stairs, was not listening.

But Tom, who was close behind them, overheard the last phrases with relish.

"Well, it's too bad you couldn't mention the Orpheum, Cis," he said with a loud laugh, "because of keeping the retreat, and now here you are talking about the drunks at the Ryans' party last New Year's Eve. You've got a *grand* idea of charitable silence, I *must* say!"

He leaped upon his way. Cecilia was stricken dumb. She assumed an expression of frozen remoteness, and, entering the sitting room, took a slim blue volume from the table, and seated herself absolutely without speaking, at some distance from the family group.

Peter Cunningham, broad, grizzled, florid, with his curly black hair thinning in the very centre of his bull-like round, hard head, was in a leather easy chair, with Ellen balancing uncomfortably upon the arm. Ellen, who customarily wore a round comb in her own lank, colourless locks, had removed it, and with it was combing and twisting her father's hair, her thin, homely, nervous little face absorbed and happy.

Mr. Cunningham had removed his pull-on shoes, and had eased his weary feet into flat, comfortable carpet slippers. The shoes were waiting for Ida or Bessy to come and carry them away; meanwhile, Paul, the baby of the family, a golden-ringletted, lace-collared, heavy-looking child of five, was pushing them to and fro, one freighted with the Dresden china shepherd-girl and the other with the iron elephant paperweight.

"Choo-choo!" said Paul, in an absorbed undertone, guiding the shoes between the various adult feet. "St——arp!" he whined, as Tom rocked the train perilously, by pressing his own foot upon the tip of a toe. "Starp, Tom!"

"Don't tease him, darlin'," Mrs. Cunningham, also in a chair, said, tenderly. "The less attention we pay——"

"There, now you look sweet, Papa!" Ellen exclaimed, suddenly, her concentrated expression relaxing as she leaned back to survey her work. "You're a young lady, Papa, and your hair is all nicely fixed for a ball!"

"You've done me very proud, I don't doubt in the least, Miss Eileen Aroon," said her father, contentedly.

"No, but, Papa, you've got to get up and look!" Ellen assured him, with various pushes and shoves of her bony little arms and person against his great bulk. "Get up—you have to get up. Go on, Papa, get up and look in the mirror and see how I've done you!"

"Ah-h, deary—deary! I've got bones in my legs!" pleaded her father, making no move.

"Oh, but you *have* to!" Ellen said, in happy assurance. But as he merely slumped the more comfortably, and as Tom gave her a faintly negative shake of the head, and her mother emphasized it, her bright little face darkened into sulkiness, and there was a hint of quivering in the muscles about her mouth. "No, but he *has* to!" she said, stubbornly and angrily now. "You've *got* to!" she persisted, in tears.

"No, now leave Papa alone, he's tired after his hard day," Mrs. Cunningham said, authoritatively. "It's very naughty of you to annoy him, and you're a silly baby to cry about it," she said, in disapproval.

"I hate everyone!" screamed Ellen from the doorway. "I hate you all! I wish I didn't belong to this horrid family! I wish I was dead!"

"Ah, no, darlin'—lovey, come back and be Papa's girl again!" said Peter Cunningham, laughing in sympathy and deep amusement, as she made her tempestuous exit. He continued to hold out a heavy arm and a hairy, freckled strong hand toward the door where she had disappeared. "She's the funny little miller's thumb,—she'll make a grand woman!" he added, contentedly, relapsing into his chair.

"Where's Aunt Allie?" murmured Mrs. Cunningham to Cecilia, suddenly remembering that she was in retreat.

Cecilia said, "She had to see about something," with only neat little movements of her beautiful mouth.

"Cis can't talk, she's keeping the custody of the tongue," Tom said through set teeth, bending the fresh cigarette in his lips toward a match.

"Don't light that cigareet in here," his father commanded, quenching him. Cecilia's luminous and triumphant eyes came up from her book.

"Can't talk, hay, darlin'?" Peter went on, addressing his eldest daughter.

Cecilia smiled, all good nature again.

"If you'll talk about something holy, Papa," she stipulated, demurely, and she laid aside her book and went to get into his lap.

"Had enough of prayers, lover?" he asked, fondling her silken fineness with enormous paws. He bunched her rich thick hair off her face. "Them little arms is thickening, Mama," he said. "She's getting to be a real big girl."

"Nineteen," Cecilia reminded him, laying her warm, smooth rosy cheek, and her dark hair, against his forehead.

"You'll be setting up a beau, one of these days," the father predicted, fondly.

She was too young to let it pass. Cecilia raised her head and looked him seriously in the eyes, although she was smiling.

"Something better than that, Papa!" she said, lightly yet firmly.

A cloud came over the man's heavy, honest face.

"Don't want to go about to dances with Kate? Kate's your cousin, and she's a grand girl," Peter suggested, wistfully.

"Kate's a dear," Cecilia conceded, with her sweet, cool little smile. "But dances don't attract me, Papa."

"Well, there's Jawn Kelly," the father added, in spite of an unmistakable push from his wife's foot. "What about Jawn? He thinks the world and all of you——"

He looked at her anxiously, despite his bantering air. Cecilia laughed, and folded his big red ears into the grizzled curls above them as she had loved to do since baby days.

"John's a dear," Cecilia conceded again, laughing merrily. "And I'm sure I'm much obliged to him!"

"Jawn'll be head of the business when I'm gone," Peter told her.

"*Maybe*——" Tom interposed, with a grin.

"You," his father addressed him, with a look of annoyance. "You keep in with Daly, and the Riordan boys, in the shipping department," he advised his son, "and you'll keep your job, *maybe*."

"Papa's only joking," Mrs. Cunningham, surprised to see her husband actually scowling, said placatingly.

"Daly!" Tom muttered, now playing with Paul's small arms, windmill fashion, as the sleepy little fellow balanced upon his knees. "He's a grand old webfoot——"

The president of the company, with a darkening brow, returned his gaze to his daughter. But it was not anger at Tom that trembled in his voice as he said:

"So poor Jawn hasn't a chance against the nuns, eh?"

If Cecilia had but seen her mother's warning glance, and indeed maintained, to use Tom's phrase, the holy custody of the tongue! But she was too young, and too earnest, to note diplomatic considerations, and she answered gravely:

"Nobody has a chance, if something else is *right*, Papa."

A look his wife had seen before, but one with which his children were entirely unfamiliar, came into Peter Cunningham's face, a hard, cunning look, and he roused himself like an awakening lion, and sent a swift glance, from his small, alert eyes, about the circle.

"I think it's about time we stopped this nonsense, Mama," he began in a voice that made Mrs. Cunningham's blood chill in her heart. "We've had enough of this convent talk—too much of it, if you ask me. I don't want to hear any more of it, and I don't want Cecy running up there all the time! You and Allie," he continued, now including his sister, just returned to the room, in a resentful look, "have filled this poor child's soft little head with God only knows what queer notions; she has no more idea what she's talking about than the baby here! I'm tired of all this foolishness about entering, and vocations, and all the rest of it!"

And dumping, or literally emptying, Cecilia upon the floor, he picked the evening newspaper from the table beside him and began to rattle the pages, glaring at them blindly, but with a

darker brow than this little group had ever seen him wear before.

There was the silence of utter consternation about him. Even Tom made no sound. Paul, sticky-faced from the consumption of a large chocolate and cocoanut pig his brother had given him a few minutes before, and with his curls somewhat stringy, and his wide embroidery collar somewhat crumpled from romping, subsided, awed and bewildered, upon his brother's shoulder.

Cecilia, scarlet-cheeked and stupefied with astonishment and pain, stood looking from the rustling newspaper sheets to her mother's distressed face and back again. Aunt Allie, her lean arms folded, her lips tightly set, her eyes blinking rapidly, rocked to and fro in an agony of fear. Mrs. Cunningham's face was flushed too, her mouth closed firmly, her nostrils dilating with her quick breath.

Papa was master of his own house, after all, and they all stood in deadly fear of him.

"Pete, that's a strange way for you to be talking," Mollie presently ventured, in a shaking voice she strove to make merely reproachful.

"Well, it's the way I'm going to talk from now on," Peter assured her, hardily, with his new grim, brief manner.

"Papa——" breathed Cecilia, impetuously, from a heaving breast.

"That'll do," he silenced her briefly. Cecilia let escape one sob, and fled wildly from the room.

"You may as well make up your mind to it, Mollie," said the master then, firmly. "There's to be no more nun talk here, and the sooner the child turns around and begins to behave herself like a sensible human being, the easier it'll be for the whole of us! It's 'Oh, I'm much obliged', when a fine feller like Jawn Kelly comes courtin', and it's 'Nothin' can stop me if it's right, Papa!' when her father talks to her, and it's all ballyhoo—and it's going to be stopped. You tell her that if I hear the word 'convent' around here in the next year, I'll go talk to the Superior myself! When she's twenty-five it'll be time enough. You and Allie——"

Allie, whose terrified expression had somewhat abated under the flow of words that seemed to be carrying the conversation safely away from her own personal neighbourhood, shuddered violently again, shut her eyes and began to rock faster than ever.

"You and Allie have nothing better to do than coax her into the notion that it's a grand thing to be a nun," Peter continued, darkly. "Well, it may be—it may be, for some ger'rls. But not for my ger'rl! You keep your hands off her, the both of you, and leave her have her fun, dancin' and flirtin' like the others—like Kate, that has no silly crazy notions of 'Oh, it's my dooty!' and 'Thank you very much but I won't marry you.'"

Mrs. Cunningham had been rallying her forces during this tirade, and now, as the thunderous voice began to drop to heavy rumblings, and Peter's eyes began to scan the newspaper headlines between words, she rushed courageously into the breach.

"Papa, that's an awful way to talk about the Sisters!" she protested, firmly yet mildly.

"Well, I'll talk worse than that," Peter growled, unimpressed. "I'll not have them nuns tampering with my ger'rl, Mollie," he added, in a rising voice. "I had a letter from Good Mother to-day, asking me to be one of five men that'd go on their bonds," he continued, "and I'd three minds to tell them I'd talk old Cahill into foreclosing on them! Let them be druv out down San Bruno way, or over into Alameder, and they'd have something else to do than talkin' a child like Cecy into thinkin' she had a vocation."

This was frightful. Allie's thin lips moved in a prayer, and she again shut her eyes tightly and raised her lean, liver-spotted face, as one expecting a bolt from the blue. Mrs. Cunningham fell silent, her eyes full of tears. Mart straightened Paul's collar, glancing stealthily meanwhile from the face of one parent to the other.

"Now, you go call your sister, Mart, and tell her to come to dinner," Peter, perhaps beginning to enjoy the novel rôle of tyrant, directed his second son, a handsome, ungainly boy of fifteen, who had just quietly entered the room. Martin wore a

pepper-and-salt suit beginning to be too small for him, his raw young wrists showed; his magnificent cap of black, thick hair was very wet and sleek in front and very dry and rough in back.

"She's cr—r—ryin'," volunteered Martin, with the slight minor whine on the words that characterized all the children.

"Do as I tell you!" shouted his father. And Martin, with the innocent alarmed look of a young animal, fled as Cecilia had fled.

"Dinner is served when you are. Take your finger out of your mouth, Paul, a great big strappin' feller like you," Grace Nolan said, dispassionately, in a quietly conversational tone, from the doorway. Grace was elderly, and had been with the family since the period of comparative obscurity known as the "McAllister Street days."

She had apparently seen nothing, and the ruffled family rapidly reorganized itself, to present to this old servitor an undisturbed front. Yet Grace was but waiting her return to the kitchen to detail the whole thing, unsparingly, albeit sympathetically and fearfully, to the domestic staff.

Cecilia came down with dignity, her eyes red, her breath still uneven. Mrs. Cunningham served the roast beef painstakingly, with more than the usual amount of murmuring to the children. Ellen, in high spirits, carried the occasion with an inspired rush of questions and confidences, however, and when Kate Walsh and John Kelly came in to call, at eight o'clock, the larger part of the family had re-gathered in the sitting room, and the visitors saw nothing amiss.

CHAPTER III

KATE, Mrs. Cunningham's niece, and the adored big cousin of all these sisters and brothers, arrived, whenever and wherever she arrived, with the vitalizing force of a fresh ocean breeze.

The circumstances of her life had up to this point been so tragic, and were even now surrounded by such bitter difficulties and disadvantages, that her elders, Aunt Maggie, Grandmother, the two incompetent uncles with whom she lived in the dreary Turk Street house, Aunt Mollie, and Aunt Allie, and Uncle Peter, here in the magnificence of the Howard Street mansion, usually put a "poor" before her name.

Kate frequently did, herself. She could hardly think of herself as anything but specially unfortunate. Yet from under her shabbiness, her poverty, her tears and humiliations and deprivations, her bubbling youth and beauty and optimism always rose triumphant, and Kate was in reality the happiest of creatures.

She was just twenty, and so six months older than Cecilia, beside whom she shone like a star. Cecy was pretty until Kate came along. Then Cecy began to seem just the rosy, healthy, blue-eyed, faintly freckled, black-curled little girl she was.

But nobody's proximity robbed Kate of beauty; it could not be done. Before the girl was fourteen she had learned to hold her young head high in disdain of admiring glances from "freshies" and "mashers" and other street-car and street-corner encounters. Mollie might take her girls down to "Maria," and fuss and worry over twelve- and fifteen-dollar hats for them, but Kate could walk into "Hale's Big, Bright, Busy Basement," and pick up, from the table marked "Choice, 98 cts.," any one of three hundred millinery confections, and look like "a picture

on a handkerchief box itself" in one and all. When Kate woke up in the morning she suggested a rose; and when she sat up in bed, in a cheap cotton nightgown, and brushed her long, soft hair at night, she sometimes reminded Aunt Maggie of the Blessed Virgin.

She was tall, yet well built, exquisitely pale, yet without the slightest hint of anemia or delicateness. Her chestnut hair, which she wore in a braided coronet about her small, shapely head, was full of gold lights, and ringed itself about her low white forehead in little feathers and sprays. With the daisy-white skin and the fair hair, her eyes were the more extraordinary, dark blue eyes, "set in with a sooty finger," and fringed with black, thick, up-curling lashes. Kate's straight little white nose was a shade short, her upper lip a hint brief, her mouth quite frankly wide; but the big teeth shone like white enamel. The chin was clean-cut, the cheek-bones high, the eyes widely separated.

Yet to analyse Kate's beauty was not to find it. It was like the beauty of a still spring day, all emerald green, perfumed, tempered with broken lights, the murmuring of water among little stones, the upbeating of blue wings. It changed, throbbed, pulsed continually into new beauties; the blue eyes flashed or darkened, the mouth had a hundred kaleidoscopic expressions, and when she bound all her bright hair into a tight cap, or when she loosened it in a glory about her straight, slender shoulders, she presented an entirely new, and an incomparably lovely, Kate, to the eyes of onlookers.

Beauty, in this circle, however, was at a discount. All the girls were pretty enough. "You be neat and say your prayers and you'll get as good a husband as the next one," was the old saying their grandmothers had brought over from Kerry and Cork, and was the spirit still. It was "grand" that little Catherine Walsh, having no mother and no father, and a dressmaking aunt and indigent grandmother, to say nothing of "them big, blunderin', good-natured ne'er-do-ye-wells of uncles" to handicap her, should have a pleasing person as an asset. But wealth was more important, and the poor child hadn't a sixpence, as

everybody knew, nor like to have one. And family backing was important, too, and it was no more than "what poor Pat done for the pig, and that's et him," that Kate's family could or would do for her.

"If *she'd* have the vocation, now!" Peter Cunningham thought, when she came in to-night, shabby and radiant, and full of joyous greetings for the clan.

His brow, still shadowed with the unprecedented unpleasantness of the scene before dinner, brightened when he saw John Kelly with her. They had encountered, it appeared, by chance, on the Fillmore Street car. John was twenty-seven, but although Peter had associated with him many older men, in the business, his hopes were all set upon John as his right hand in the next score of years, and his successor when the time for a successor should come. His own boy, Tom, would prove to be a valuable man some day, please God. But John was unique, the unusual, the priceless find for the manager of a growing concern.

"Where's Tom and Aunt Mollie?" demanded Kate, distributing kisses. "Paul, you darling, do you love Kate? But give me a French kiss then—no, but hug me—*hard!*—— Give me another—— Ah, you angel! You're in retreat, aren't you, Cis? I told Mr. Kelly so, but on he came," Kate threw in, in parentheses. "He had to see Uncle Pete about a carload of catsup or something, he said. Do you know what I heard to-day, Cis?" she went on. "I heard it in the Library. It was Veronica Crowley's married sister Regina Lynch who told me. She said you were going to be a nun, and that Veronica had made this retreat and said everyone said so, and Aunt Mag said that if you did go in, Uncle Peter was going maybe to give the nuns that big lot back of the convent."

A sulphurous silence warned her. But this specimen of feminine gossip rather pleased than freshly angered Peter. Characteristic of their gabble, these pious women! Moreover, his young favourite was beside him, and Peter's one real topic of conversation was naturally his business. Time discussing anything else was time wasted, with Jawn here.

So he contented himself with a brief, bitter laugh, and said significantly to Kate:

"You run with them women, my dear, and you'll hear a good deal more than your prayers! Give them a lot, is it? Ain't they the grand crew for cookin' things up, Jawn?"

"Papa," Cecilia said, patiently and dutifully, "may I go with Aunt Allie, if she goes to church? I can't talk anyway, because——"

"I'm not going!" Miss Cunningham put in hastily and fearfully, not looking at anybody, but rocking convulsively once more.

Cecilia was silent a moment, and the colour crept into her face.

"Then I think I'll go upstairs to bed," she suggested, quietly.

"Stay here and talk," her father directed her, restlessly.

"Papa, I can't. I'm in retreat."

"Run up to bed, dear, we'll take care of Kate and Jawn," Mollie said, maternally, returning to the room. Cecilia gave her mother's hand a convulsive, grateful pressure as she went, and Peter, although his eyes followed her discontentedly, made no protest. "Come here, Kate, I want to speak to you," Mollie bade her niece, drawing her to the hall door. "Tom's goin' out to-night, God knows where," she confided, anxiously. "Run up to his room, darlin', and see can you coax him down here amongst all of us, now that Jawn's here?"

"All right, dear," Kate answered, straightening the folds of her aunt's full basque with capable slender hands, and speaking with a little air of understanding and responsibility that sat oddly upon her twenty years. "But—here it is, Aunt Mollie," she added, half seriously, "don't you tell Aunt Maggie again that Kate's flirting with poor Tom!"

Mollie saw the flush upon the beautiful face, and a pang tore through her mother's heart. Surely little Kate Walsh wasn't setting her cap for Tom, seriously? That'd never do in the world! Mollie felt frightened. "Am I and Pete leaving them drift into something?" she asked herself, feeling suddenly helpless before youth, and beauty, and the inexorable forces of nature.

"Sure Tom's always liked Kate, and her him, they're cousins,"

Peter said to her more than once. But Mollie began to be afraid to-night of something more. They were not really cousins, they were less, for Kate's dead father had only been Mollie's younger half-brother. And although all the children had always loved Kate, her influence upon Tom had lately been made the subject of some family teasing.

She would hold him to-night, Mollie knew, and was cut to the heart to know; she would easily keep him at home, with her laughter and chatter, and her music. And Tom must be kept at home, all boys his age should. Kate could do what had to be done, and what his mother and father could not do. "It throws them together, but what else can I do?" Mollie thought, her anxious fears seeking madly for an alternative.

She herself had just been sitting helpless, in his room, watching him dress, and sick with her own impotency where safeguarding him was concerned.

"Where is it to-night, darlin'?" she had asked.

"Oh, nowhere special!"

"That's enough for Mama, I suppose?"

"What do you want to know, Mollie dear?" He had laughed, kissed her, and fallen silent.

"Is it with Leo?"

"Leo, my God! That monk?"

"Who is it then, dear?"

"I don't know, Mama, honest. It's nobody special. I'm just going over to Dick's for a while, maybe we'll stay right there."

"Is Dick Dimond a good boy, Tom?"

"How d'ye mean good?"

Mollie had not liked the slightly truculent tone. She had been silent, had sighed, and had presently gone away.

"Going out evenings" meant everything terrible for her boy. It meant drink, and bad companions and gambling and women, and dancing hells, it meant danger, and sin. "God, keep the child from sin! Leave me die, but preserve him in his baptismal innocence!" Mollie had prayed, going downstairs. And downstairs, like an answer from God, was Kate, who had performed

the kindly office of preserver to her handsome cousin many a time before, without Tom ever suspecting it.

Mollie did not want Kate to capture her son, as a husband. But while Kate had appeared fancy free, and was so disturbingly cool on the subject, there was surely no harm in using her. So Mollie once more implored the girl's help, and Kate, catching the excited and flattered Ellen by the hand, ran lightly up the stairs to Tom's big room.

"Oh, Tom, I'm dying—oh, why did we run—oh, Ellen, get off of me!" gasped Kate, entering without announcement, and casting herself and the child breathless upon the couch.

"My God, you're a sweet, restful influence in anybody's life, Kate!" Tom, with a pleasant undercurrent of admiration in his unexpectedly poised male voice, assured her, from the bureau. "Why don't you throw a couple of sticks of dynamite into the room, and give a fellow some warning?"

"Tom, you look stunning!" Kate said with conviction, tears of laughter and breathlessness in her eyes. "Come on downstairs and sing!"

"I gotter go out," Tom responded, but without enthusiasm. Nobody but Kate ever heard these odd throaty notes in his speech, or saw the shamed, daring, half-bold and half-shy light she saw in his eyes. "You'd have the whole crowd pressing around the piano, and pawing us both to death," he added, hesitating. "That one," he concluded, with a darkling glance at Ellen, "can breathe on your neck until it's all wet, and then tickle it with the end of her braids until you'd want to brain her."

Ellen, about to weep, was arrested by Kate's silvery burst of delicious laughter, and laughed too, long and squawkingly.

"Can the college yell, for the love of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary!" begged Tom, whose scholastic years under the Jesuits had given him an ease in ecclesiastical reference sometimes disquieting to his mother. But Kate only laughed again. "Could you jettison a portion of the cargo?" he asked, significantly, of Ellen.

For answer the girl looked down at the child's straight tawny braids that bobbed and jerked about beside her.

"I don't believe it would be safe," Kate murmured, raising glorious eyes. "A young girl like me—unchaperoned——"

"You know darn *well* it wouldn't be safe," Tom assured her, sitting down beside her. He loosened Ellen firmly from her grip upon her cousin. "Run downstairs and tell Mama we're going to sing," he said.

Ellen departed, glad to be entrusted with even a message from the god of her youthful idolatry, and the two young persons, left in the big room, looked half laughing and half scared at each other.

"Hello, Catherine," Tom said then, in a queer, shaky voice. He advanced a hand along the plush of the divan, and laid it over hers.

"Hello, Thomas," Kate answered, leaning back, and so a trifle away from him, excitedly laughing now.

"Do you know you're very pretty, Kate?" Tom said.

"I've heard it," Kate, after a moment's pause, during which they looked steadily at each other, responded sedately.

Tom moved himself nearer her, and put his strong young arm about her shoulders, and they both trembled.

The room was large, plainly furnished, and comfortable. Kate had been here a hundred times, a thousand times, she knew its every detail of tennis-rackets, school banners, and jumbled photographs. She had spent Saturday afternoons here, years ago, playing "Lotto" and "Parchesi" with Cecy and the boys, when the weather was wet, or the young Cunninghams had colds.

Oddly, to-night, she thought of it for the first time as a man's room, and of herself as a woman, here. Tom had been making love to her, in a more or less desultory fashion, for several—well, it amounted to weeks. She was beginning to be a little self-conscious about his kissing her; she always felt Tom's presence in a room, now, in a way she had never done a few months ago.

There was no harm in sitting here, of course, with his arm about her. Kate even liked it; the friendliness and bigness

and quiet in the room, the knowledge of the murmuring household downstairs, of Cecy, Aunt Allie, Mart and Ellen, and the sense of the sweet, treacherously soft and perfumed night outside —a May night, warm and damp, after a wet April.

"I love this house," she said, dreamily. To a girl who lived in an old-fashioned cottage in Turk Street, it might well seem a palace, and so it always had seemed to Kate Walsh.

"Do you like *me?*" Tom paraphrased it.

"You know I do," she said, easily.

"The trouble with you, Kate," the boy presently defined, "is that too many people fall in love with you. Kelly, now—he came with you, did he?"

"John Kelly? Not he! We just met on the car. He'd as soon go after Aunt Allie! He'll marry some girl with money, John will," said Kate, without resentment. "Anyway, I think he likes Cecy," she added.

"Well, come on. How long is it since your last Confession?" Tom resumed. "Did Gerald Ohler come through?"

"Tom! What a horrible way to talk!"

"Come on—come on! Did he ask you?"

"Ye-es," said Kate, after a pause, and with an air of great candour, "in a way he did, and in a way he didn't!"

"How do you mean 'in a way he did, and in a way he didn't'?"

"Well," admitted Kate, with a slight frown, "I guess he—thought—he did——"

"*Thought* he did! My God, don't you know it when a man asks you to marry him?" Tom demanded, roundly. Kate flushed warmly.

"A lot of your business it is, Tom."

"You're my business. Say, why wouldn't you have him, Kate?"

"Oh, I don't love him, I guess. I like him. He doesn't count, one way or another!"

"What's he getting?"

"Oh, I don't know—a hundred, I guess. No, I think he said thirty a week. It wasn't that."

"How about Matt?"

"Oh, Tom, you're terrible! I wish I never told you anything."

"You didn't tell me—he did. Did you throw him down?"

"No, I didn't." Kate denied it flatly.

"You *didn't?*"

"No, of course not. In the first place, Matt never asked me."

"Never *asked* you! Why, he said himself he asked you on Christmas Eve."

"Oh, then? Oh, yes, he did *then*," Kate amended, innocently. "I thought you meant lately!"

Tom laughed loudly.

"I bet you I could get you away from the whole crowd of them," he boasted, with a keen look.

Kate somewhat disengaged herself, laughing too, but flushed. "You oughtn't to, Tom."

"Oughtn't to what?"

"Oughtn't to——" With a backward reach of her left hand she lightly touched his firm fingers clamped on her left shoulder. "Your mother mightn't like it," she murmured.

The fascination of her closeness to him was strong upon him; he brought his handsome, impudent face near to her own, and their eyes, still staring half frightened and half laughing at each other, seemed to work a sort of happy spring madness in the quiet room.

"Aren't you my cousin?" Tom said, in a low voice that shook with real feeling, even under its teasing note.

"Not quite. Papa was only your mother's half-brother, after all."

"All the better, Kate!" the boy answered, tightening his grip.

"There was an old servant Grandma used to have," Kate presently began, her eyes widening in solemn childish warning, "and she said that a priest told her once at a Mission that it was no sin to kiss your cousin, as long as you didn't want to. But that the minute you began to enjoy it," Kate's tone was grave, "then *sin entered!*" she concluded. And this time they laughed together, joyously.

"Kate, do you like these talks we have?" Tom asked, luxuriously.

"You know I do!"

"What do you s'pose they'd say, if we took it into our heads to fall in love with each other?" the boy asked.

"You mean reasonably, seriously?" Kate asked in turn, as if at twenty and twenty-two, on this spring night, they two could discuss, of all others, this particular subject seriously and reasonably. "I think," she added, thoughtfully, "that Aunt Mollie would never forgive me!"

"Oh, rot!" Tom scoffed. But the thought had put a real shadow into Kate's beautiful eyes, and she was staring frowningly into space.

"She'd think I stole you away from her, Tom," the girl submitted with a brief, troubled laugh. And suddenly she was upon her feet, and had turned to drag him to his with both firm young hands, saying joyously: "You'd be too big a catch for me, Thomas, and besides that I'm going to marry a millionaire and be an old man's darling, and you can have Marion Taylor herself, for all I care! Coming, Aunt Allie!" Kate called, in answer to a sort of wail from the floor below. And she and Tom went down the two broad flights of stairs hand in hand, with such shrieks of laughter and thundering of young feet as went far to reassure Tom's mother, who had been uneasy, suspicious of their "flirtin' up in Tom's room", for some moments.

"Your mama was wondering where you were," Aunt Allie said, lifelessly, as they tore and struggled and gasped their way by her, in the upper hall, and— "My God, is it an earthquake!" Peter commented, mildly, as they entered the sitting room.

All men made love to Kate, she was entirely used to the enchanting experience of cutting short the dangerous tête-à-tête, only to be more pursued and desired than ever under the eyes of the unsuspicious crowd. But Tom had never seemed a real possibility before. Tom, too? she said to herself, with a dimple twitching the corner of her mouth, as she seated herself demurely before the old square piano.

"Asthore?" she asked, beginning the accompaniment. Tom had a fine voice, he loved to use it. But with the first chords the lamplight on Kate's youngness, roundness, sweetness, the sound of her significantly laughing voice, the memory of those exquisite stolen moments upstairs, Tom experienced a sort of intoxication, and could only stand beside her laughing and fumbling with loose sheets of music on the rack.

Ellen joined them. Hers was the real voice of the family, but as usual when pointedly excluded, to-night she forced her way into the group and when begged to sing "The Minstrel Boy" for Papa, she hung her head and whined.

Paul was tearfully banished; Ellen protestingly had to follow; Martin, having upset a vase of flowers, caught his sleeve on the lamp and crushed one castor on a heavy chair, dragged his ungainly length upstairs; and the big house settled into peace.

Tom sang "Tara's Halls", and "Just a Song at Twilight", and Peter, with an apologetic, smiling shake of his head, openly wiped his eyes. Young John Kelly, as always friendly, silent, observant, sat back in his big chair, glad to be merely an onlooker. Mollie and her sister-in-law talked in undertones continually, in the pauses between the songs, or even straight through them.

"Aggie said she wouldn't wonder would Harry come back to live with them, now poor Nellie's gone," the women murmured, "they never got on very good."

"I heard that Lizzie kep' his room just like it was the night he died, the medicines and all beside the bed. God help her, she'll be a long time getting over it. Clara says if she's took off an ounce she's took off twenty pound——"

"Clara lent them the loan of her relic, but she says he was too far gone, he was rattlin' before ever she got to the house——"

"Oh, the dear Lord help us all!"

And so on and on. Mollie's heart was brimful of vague troubles to-night, and she gave small heed to what she said. She and Allie could keep the conversational pot at a low, unimportant simmer for hours at a time. Often they sat up almost

all night, discussing the affairs of others, tiny details of old funerals and long-ago family fights.

"That's pretty, about the birds," Mollie said, in a louder voice presently, of a song. Tom sang it again, with a flourish.

> For his song is all of the joy of life,
> And in the bright spring weather,
> We two have listened, while he sang,
> Our hearts and lips together.

His big voice filled the room; he ended with a look for Kate, and his mother saw it. Kate missed none of it, her blood was dancing to new music to-night. Suddenly everything about the familiar old house seemed changed, seemed fraught with trembling, shimmering, quivering beauty. Tom's nearness made her heart beat fast, and the glances they exchanged—innocent glances for so many young, cousinly years!—were full of queer thrills and surprises.

"Tom, you scare me," she murmured, over an accompaniment.

"I what, asthore?" His sleek black head was bent.

"I say, you scare me!"

"You little darling, I wish I did! Scare you of what?"

More chords, and the rich, curling dark lashes dropped over the apricot-stained, creamy pallor of her cheeks.

"I don't know," she half whispered.

"More music!" commanded Peter, less unobserving than might have been supposed. "What about the little ships?"

Tom, bold, confident, laughing in the mellow lamplight, sang it with all his own natural, audacious grace:

> So all the little ships come sailing home across the sea,
> Their voyage safely ended, their way they've wended
> Home where they would be!
> They sail across the bar where no storms are,
> All dangers passed,
> And two by two together,
> Come safely home at last!

Little ships! Mollie's eyes met her husband's, and, struck by the same thought, they smiled at each other through a dazzle

of tears. Little ships—the big house was the safe harbour for them all to-night. Petulant little bewildered baby ships asleep upstairs in the nursery, the white young ship that was Cecilia ready for her virgin trip, Mart's daring young bark almost seaworthy; other dear, ignorant, restless young ships here in the sitting room, shaking their untried sails in the breeze.

"Sing it again, Tom," Peter commanded, and Tom and Kate went through it a second time, with even more feeling.

And then it was after ten, and Kate had to go. John would see her home. Not necessary, she assured him blithely, the car went within forty feet of the door. Of course he would see her home, he said, with kind, grave persistence. No, Tom would. Well, then both——

In the end, Tom sulkily declined the divided duty, and Kate went off with John. Mollie was tearing the air with sharp yawns as she went wearily up the big stairs.

She lay awake long that night, worried about a dozen trifles. She was tired in mind and body, and all her problems took on grotesque and menacing shapes. Her heart would begin to hammer violently as she thought of Ellen's tonsils; somebody had known of a child who bled to death under that operation. Then she would remember what Martin had confided to her, when she looked in upon him, undressing a few hours ago. Martin was specializing in chemistry, for no particular reason than that he liked it, and this month he had broken seventeen dollars' worth of tubes and glasses. Brother Hippolyte had sent his mother a note with the bill.

Seventeen dollars was not much to Peter Cunningham. But seventeen dollars' worth of broken glass might well seem a serious matter to him. He would be "fit to be tied" with anger at Martin. Well, then, thought Mrs. Cunningham, turning restlessly about in her big bed, at her sleeping lord's side, Peter mustn't know. She must get the money some way.

She had no money of her own; she hated the mysteries of a check-book. Like many another good wife of her type, she charged everywhere, and asked Peter at the breakfast table for such pocket-money as she needed. Maybe Pete'd give her a

couple of twenties to-morrow, if he had them with him, she mused.

Paul's croup, Ellen's tonsils, Martin's wildness—ah! and Tom and Kate Walsh. Tom was falling in love with Kate. His mother saw it clearly.

Little Kate Walsh walking off with a Cunningham! That'd be queer doings. A big catch for a girl like that—poor Robbie's girl. Mollie visioned Kate betrothed to Tom, and a writhing pang of pure jealousy shook her. There'd be dinners and goings-on, of course, and presently a big Cathedral wedding—Kate Walsh would be Mrs. Thomas Cunningham.

Mollie couldn't bear it. She was suffocating. The air seemed full of mocking demons, taking her dearly prized honours away from her and giving them to Kate.

She got out of bed, padded about like a restless big mother bear. As usual, Pete had forgotten to open the window. No wonder she couldn't get to sleep. She pushed the heavy sash up a few inches, and got back into bed.

The street light shone in a bright angle on the wall. The room was full of muffled big shapes, loops of drapery, bulky furniture. Kate and Tom—the spectre rose full-formed before the boy's mother again. Her heart hammered anxiously. Kate would get him; Kate would own this house some day, this fabulous mansion that Mollie and Peter had builded for themselves; Kate would have babies, big, strong, hard boy babies.

Mollie would be old—displaced. She felt as if her heart would burst with the agony of being supplanted by merciless youth.

Well, but this was nonsense. The children had only chanced to look sweet at each other, that was all. Tom felt to Kate as a sister, and as for the girl—Mollie's mouth tightened. She wasn't going to walk in here and take him, now, not if his mother knew it! Maybe a hint to Maggie, a hint to Kate herself, or maybe if the boy could be gotten out of the way——

A sudden light broke upon Mollie's anxious pondering, and she felt a wave of cool relief sweep over her. Paris! That'd be it. Tom should go to Paris. He'd been talking Paris ever

since he finished school, a year ago. His old school friend, Joseph Harrison, was going there, in a few weeks, to study art, and why not persuade Peter that Tom ought to go, too, to study singing? She could make Pete think that he himself was the instigator of the notion. Indeed, she could open the subject no later than to-morrow with some such a key phrase as: "Well, Pete, do you know I think you're in the right of it, after all, and maybe a few months of study abroad would sort of settle the boy."

Not that Pete had ever voiced any such sentiment, far from it. But when he heard it he would immediately think he had.

Peter and Mollie had both been vaguely opposed to the idea; vaguely because even Tom's importunity had not carried it beyond a few joking allusions. Mollie had shrunk from the mere thought of giving up her boy. Almost nothing, indeed, had been heard of it for months. But Mollie could revive it in half an hour, could settle it in a few days, she knew. She'd begin, planned this loving schemer, by telling Pete what Willie Harrison was doing for Joe. Going to send the boy abroad for a year's work, and let him see Rome and Ireland before he came back. Ah, well, the Harrisons could well do it; they hadn't but the one child.

That'd touch Pete in his most sensitive spot, pride in what he could afford to do for the children.

And Joe Harrison's immediate departure would be an excuse for hurrying Tom off, too. Mollie winced a little at the thought. But it was one sure, quick way of stopping this nonsense with Kate. She could use that argument with Pete, too. For Pete had said heavily to-night that he didn't propose to encourage any nonsense between their Tom and Kate Walsh. And to Mollie's curious and sympathetic, "Why not, Papa?" he had added that while she was a dear little ger'rl, he hoped the boy would wait awhile, and make a different marriage when he did marry. Self-made, and quick to notice real fineness and merit where younger men were concerned, as in the case of John Kelly, yet Peter had his traces of snobbery, as it was inevitable that he should. He had risen from nothing to great heights. There

was no reason why his children should not rise still higher. And his wife's niece, a working girl, saddled with a group of wretchedly helpless elderly relatives, offered, as a wife, no upward step to a Cunningham.

Paris, Mollie exulted, perfecting her plan in a brain that fairly seethed with details, Paris was the solution! Six weeks more would see Tom safely out of Kate's way for a good long year.

She was subsiding gradually into drowsiness when a fresh thought shot across her mind, and her heart began to thump nervously again. Cecilia's vocation, and the empty lot, and the end of the retreat to-morrow! Worries swarmed like bees about poor Mollie's wearied head once more.

Pete had been so "ugly",—it was his wife's word for these rare ungracious moods of his,—Pete had been so ugly about the whole thing to-night! Mollie and Allie had known of plenty of other fathers who took this dramatic stand. But it seemed different, now that it was Pete.

Cecy, he had said inflexibly, was to wait for a year. No more nonsense about vocations for a year. He didn't want to hear it, and he trusted Mollie not to encourage it privately. The child was to keep away from the convent, and if she had any energy to spare, leave her take care of her little sister and brothers, said her father.

Well, there was nothing for Mollie to do but face the situation, then. If Sister Aloysius made any further playful allusion to the property Mollie would simply have to tell her the whole truth, that the poor child's father had been in a terrible way about it, and "fit to be tied", and exactly what were his terms.

"Let her fall in love with some decent feller like Jawn Kelly," Peter had gone on to say: but Mollie certainly would not quote that. Her motherly resentment, if concealed, had been up in arms at that. Let the men make much of John, if they would, in a business way. But hand her lily-child over to any one so ordinary, so plain——!

Mollie could never forget that Jawn had been taken into the business as office-boy only a few years before. It was twelve years, but she always thought of it as about five. Office-boy—

red-wristed, shabby, tousle-headed, no bigger nor more important than her own poor wild Mart!

Cecy wanted to be a nun, little saint that she was. But failing a vocation, she could look a good deal higher than little Jawn Kelly!

The mother's last thought, as all her troubled thoughts sank into peace, was purely physical. Tired as she was, she would have to get up at a good, prompt half-past six, to be at the convent in time for the end of the retreat! Mollie was conscious of a weak temptation to drop the whole thing. Suppose she just slept late in the morning; she could tell Cecy she had overslept. The child would be broken-hearted, but it would save Mollie the awkwardness of following yesterday's expansive enthusiasm about the vocation, and the gift of property, with what must surely be a humiliatingly altered position to-morrow.

All she need do was oversleep! If Allie didn't take it upon herself to rap at her door——

"Well, Sister, my husband has took a very firm stand about the poor child's vocation, entirely," Mollie drowsily imagined herself saying. It would be hard, it would put her in the position of a fool.

Midnight boomed solemnly from the hall, and was followed by twelve neat, light strokes from the French clock on the mantel. Midnight!

"I'm lying awake all night worrying about the children," Mollie thought, with simple awe. "It's true what my mother's told me many and oft's the time. 'When they're little they break your back, and when they're big they break your heart on you!'"

And heaving a deep sigh, she was immediately asleep.

CHAPTER IV

SO SHORT a time before all their problems had seemed to be so simple! Problems of broken legs, measles, arithmetic, poison-oak, of Mart being "sassy" to Brother Borromeo, and Ellen disobeying Papa!

And now they were all men and women, and poor Mollie, looking back with an aching heart at the days of their wading in brooks and quarrelling for the one piece of pineapple that always came on top of the boxes of candy, felt that there was never a night that a body could get off to sleep for worrying about them.

One trouble, solved and surmounted, only led to another. One could say "Mama knows best", or "You do as Papa tells you", but the young things didn't believe it, didn't act upon it, and went their own infinitely disturbing ways.

Mollie had so concentrated her forces upon the matter of getting Tom off to Paris, had carried the whole thing with so high a hand, that the boy had actually kissed them all good-bye, over at the Oakland mole, and had come back to kiss the crying Kate again, and had huskily asked his mother "to write, and tell him about everybody—and Kate," before she had seemed to have time to analyse, in cold blood, the wisdom of sending him away at all, and granting that he should go somewhere for safety's sake, to Paris of all places.

Not but what Tom was happy and busy and, at least as far as letters were any indication, well-behaved, in Paris. That was one of the things that worried his mother. He was too happy; he wrote frankly that San Francisco, after Paris, seemed like a regular jumping-off place, and if Papa would make him an allowance of a hundred a month he'd stay in France the rest of his life.

She seemed to have lost Tom. And this year of awaiting her father's permission to enter the convent seemed strangely to have lost Cecy to her family, too. Cecy had drawn into herself, had become remote, silent, reserved.

There had been a terrible scene, the first in her sunshiny, well-ordered young life, when Cecy had realized that Papa was in deadly earnest, and that her vocation was not to be the simple thing of joy, holiness, incense, serge frock and plain veil, admiration, and envy, that she had so fondly and romantically imagined. Cecy had flown to her favourite nun, had wept, begged, protested—she was nineteen, she hated the world, she detested men and lovers and the idea of marriage. Please, Papa, please, Mom, please, Sister—for God's sake, let her in! Let her enter, the time of waiting was wasted! Her mind had been made up since the day of her First Communion—please, please, Ellen and Kate and Aunt Allie, pray for her intention!

No use. Peter had been adamant, and even gentle Sister Ignatius had shown an unexpected firmness. Cecilia was so young, the nun had reasoned, a year of obedience would not be too long a test. Plenty of time. Cecilia should come to them next year at Pentecost, instead of this year.

Myra Garvey entered the convent, and Cecilia shed floods of tears. Lizzie Kennedy went East to join the Carmelites, and Cecilia cried all night. "She might just as well enter," commented Tom, "as act like such a bonehead!"

The girl lost her rosy, healthy beauty, and became sullen and cold. Her father missed his little confidante and chum; her mother's heart bled silently in sympathy. Cecy's attitude toward John Kelly amounted to positive rudeness, and John came rarely nowadays to the big house in Howard Street. And Martin was suspended from school for insubordination, and sent by his disgusted father up to a ranch in Stanislaus County, to "sweat some of the devil out of him," as Peter put it forcefully.

A blight seemed to have fallen upon the family, with Mart gone, Cecy entirely metamorphosed, and Tom a long two-weeks' journey away, in Paris. The days went on and on; Mollie bought Mart a new sweater when he came down in November,

and reinstated him with many explanations and promises in his school work; she trimmed a tree and had all the Walshes at the house for Christmas, and Ellen had her usual January tonsillitis.

"The big boy's in Paris; he's doing very good work there, but we expect him back, to go into the firm with his papa, next summer," Mollie said, meeting other women on the convent steps or shopping in one of the city's large department stores, and she tried to sound satisfied. And when March came, in a flood of glory and warmth, she dared to add, to old friends: "Cecy'll probably enter in a month or two. We aren't saying very much about it because her Papa feels so strong on the subject. But she's twenty now, and she's had the idea for years!"

"Are you happy about it, Cecy?" Kate Walsh asked her cousin one night when she had come into the Cunningham house for one of her little evening calls. The two girls were on the sofa in Mollie's room, hands clasped, chattering of everything and nothing, after a few days' chance separation.

"Oh, happy——!" Cecy answered, with a smile. "Mama and I bought the serge for my dress to-day," she added, in a little rush of confidence, after a glance at the door to be sure that they could not be overheard.

Kate's glorious eyes widened, her breath came fast. This was thrilling indeed.

"Don't say anything about it," warned Cecy. "But Aunt Maggie's coming to sew, to make Ellen some ginghams and so on, and she'll make my dress next week! Mama can't get her again until June, and that'll be"—Cecy's voice rose exultantly—"that'll be too late!" she ended, gladly.

"Yes, but Aunt Maggie is an awful gab," Kate reminded her, without disrespect. "She'll have it all over the place that you're getting your postulant's dress. Your father will be sure to hear it."

"Ah, but I shall ask Papa next week—Easter Week," Cecilia answered, still with her air of rejoicing. "You see, it was at last year's retreat, Kate, that I asked him, and that was the second week in April. The year is up! And Lent being so late

this year, that brings it into Easter Week; Mama says it's a sign! Anyway, she and I are going to have a talk with Sister on Easter Sunday, and immediately afterward—oh, Kate, I shall be so happy! And except for Sister Regina, who died, I shall be the youngest ever to enter! We got serge for two dresses, and my veils, too! My sleeves I'm going to have long; you know that makes your hands look so nice."

Kate laughed. "You oughtn't to think of such things, Cecy!"

The other girl flushed sensitively. She could not help thinking that she would look extraordinarily young, kneeling among the older nuns in her new plain serge, with the thin black veil over her curly hair. Cecy had determined long ago to be more than humanly "recollected" in chapel, to oblige some edified nun occasionally to touch her on the arm, to remind her that the time for devotion was over.

"That's Cecilia Cunningham," outsiders, coming in for Benediction, would whisper. "They say she's almost a mystic!"

Kate's good-natured laughter hurt her. Her exalted mood vanished, and she felt almost ill-tempered.

"But what's this about your getting a new dress of net and lace and I don't know what all?" asked the unconscious Kate.

"Oh, Papa's going to take me somewhere!" Cecilia answered, indifferently and shortly.

"A last taste of the giddy world?" Kate asked. "It's a dinner, isn't it, or is it a dance? What a trial for you!"

"It's both," Cecilia said, her equilibrium somewhat restored by the consideration that the worldly parents of many great cloister saints had thus forced upon them a final plunge into things mundane.

"Pink lace and orchids Easter Monday night, and the convent on Tuesday. I wish to goodness I could go to the party in your place!" Kate said.

"I wish Papa wouldn't make me!" Cecilia complained. But even as she spoke, the vision of herself garbed in the rosy cloud of the new dress, and admired and courted in the gay whirl of music and feasting, yet so soon to abandon it all for the sober

serge of the scapular, appealed suddenly to her youthful sense of the dramatic.

Both girls fell silent. It happened to be one of Kate's despairing times, when life seemed too hard to be borne. But she never brought those moods here. Her thoughts followed more than one idle path before she asked casually:

"Any news from Tom?"

"Except that he doesn't want to come back. Mama feels terribly about it."

"They couldn't wait to rush him off into God knows what dangers to his soul and body—losing checks and seeing a poor dead feller that was drowned hauled out of one of their rivers," Aunt Allie, who was putting fresh linen clothes away in Mollie's bureau, put in bleakly.

"Tom was sweet on Kate!" Ellen contributed, trailing Aunt Allie.

"Tom was not!" Kate answered, laughing.

"I'd 'a' been glad enough to have him sweet on Catherine or anybody else, so that he'd stay home!" Mollie entirely ready to believe that she had always felt so, said sadly, coming in to sit down rather heavily.

"You didn't always feel so, Aunt Mollie!" Kate commented, smiling.

"Indeed I did, dear. If you mean you and him," said Mrs. Cunningham, self-defensively, "it was natural enough that I should wish him to have his little fling, and him not pushing twenty-three yet, before he'd be settling down. But God knows all I'd want for him is a good wife——" She drifted into silence.

"I'm not in love with Tom, Aunt Mollie, and never was," Kate said with sudden seriousness and quietness, after a pause. Cecilia, full of religious dreams and visions, looked at her with a little simple admiration and awe. Kate was really a woman, to take that definite tone where a love affair was concerned!

"Well, I know that, dear," Mollie agreed, quick to save the girl's pride. "And at the same time, should you and Tom take a fancy to each other, there'd be no reason in the world——"

"Never!" Kate said in a whisper, with her eyes far away. And Cecilia felt another thrill. Kate somehow seemed grown-up to-night.

"You and me, Kate," Mollie said, a little tremulously, and seeing nothing; "we'd like to have the lad home again, wouldn't we?"

She leaned forward and laid her soft, full hand over Kate's hand, and Kate suddenly bent her beautiful glowing face to it, and kissed it.

"Indeed I hope he'll be back this summer, Aunt Mollie!" she said, gently. But Cecilia knew somehow that Kate didn't care, that way, for Tom any more, if indeed she ever had.

"You take a very different tone from the way you and Pete talked last year, Mollie," Miss Cunningham, now running a lean discoloured hand into socks, and still standing at the bureau, reminded her sister-in-law.

"I?" Mollie echoed, roundly. "Wasn't I the one that was all for having him remain at home?"

"H'm!" Aunt Allie said, shortly And she smiled in an obscure and sinister triumph as she matched the socks.

"Well, we'll have him back this summer, and please God he'll stay here!" Kate, the peacemaker, interposed skillfully.

"Kate," Ellen asked rapturously, winding herself about Kate's legs, as she lay on the floor, "is it fun to have men in love with you?"

Kate, beautiful and flushed, looked down at her little cousin with a smile twitching at the corner of her mouth.

"Y-es," she admitted, with a little deprecatory glance for the circle. "Yes, on the whole I think it is."

"Kate, is any one in love with you *now?*" persisted the little girl.

"Isn't she terrible!" Cecilia murmured, with a little laugh of relish. But Cecy was interested, too.

"I heard Jim Yeats was sweet on you, Kate," Aunt Allie suggested, smiling.

"That old man!" Kate evaded, gaily. "If he is, I hope he keeps it to himself!"

"Kate, did you and Tom——" Ellen was beginning, when her mother cut her short.

"Don't worry Kate about Tom, lovey. He'll be home one of these days to speak for himself!"

"Yes, but, Mama, if Kate married Tom, how could she be my sister if she's my cousin?" Ellen demanded.

Kate, again with that new, wise gravity that Cecilia noticed so strongly about her to-night, caught the little hands, as Ellen perched astride of her knees, and smiled at her affectionately.

"Tommy and I were only like a brother and sister, Ellen dear," she said, as if to the child. But her elders knew that she was really addressing them. "I could no more fall in love with him than if he were my brother," Kate added.

Mollie, sitting in a deep upholstered chair a few feet away, heard the new note in her tone, too, and wondered at it, with a little fear in her heart. What had changed the child, that she should be talking so soberly about the things she had laughed at youthfully only a few months ago?

Kate and Ellen were now tussling mildly; Aunt Allie had seated herself with her mending basket. Cecilia leaned back on the couch, staring dreamily at the other girls, and thinking, her mother knew, how few more of these happy, homely evenings in Mama's room were left to her. Her eyes were deeply satisfied as she dreamed, but a sudden pang seized the mother's heart. Was she really to pack the plain, dainty underwear and the little serge dresses, and permit the precious oldest girl to kiss father, brothers, and sister good-bye—in a few days, now, only a few days!—for evermore? For the first time Mollie realized what it meant.

"Well, I wonder are we all going crazy that we could even be thinking about it?" she asked herself, in panic. "No more of my little Cecy—ever? God help me, I'll never let her go! She's had me bewitched with her talk."

Musing thus, her eyes went on to Kate, who had leaned back, so that although her arm still encircled Ellen, her radiant and glowing face was close to Martin's face. Martin had brought in his Latin Grammar, and Kate was bringing her

beautiful thick brushed brows together in a faint frown as she studied it.

"For the love of Saint Louise of Prussia," she murmured.

"It's crazy, isn't it!" Mart agreed, eagerly. But Kate was absorbed again, and presently the puzzle, whatever it was, was all straightened out, and Martin, although he continued to slump comfortably against her firm young shoulder, went on with his studying alone.

How the children all loved Kate, Mrs. Cunningham thought, not surprised to have little Paul trail sleepily in, in his nightgown, and climb into the maternal lap. And how sweet it was to have them all together, with Kate to chatter to and confide in!

"Kate's like her father—like Robbie," decided Mrs. Cunningham, remembering the dear half-brother who had been her inseparable chum thirty years before. "He might have done good for her, if he hadn't died on the poor child! There was a feller that could charm the birds off the bushes for you, did he but have the chance! You'd wonder," her pondering ended simply, "that the Lord would leave Harry and Charley, that never done a lick of work the longest day they ever lived, and take a boy like poor Robbie!"

Ah, if Tom only were here, one of this happy, murmuring, laughing group: Cecy so angelic, Mart studying, little Ellen perfectly contented when she could have her Katy to play with, Paul half asleep, and Aunt Allie listening and nodding. If Tom were home, and openly and acceptedly Kate's sweetheart! "Sure, it wouldn't be losing him at all, to let her have him!" Mollie assured herself.

So far had she come from the old fearful jealousies of a year ago. Mollie would never believe again that his youthful affair with his cousin had played any part in Tom's being sent away. Even Peter, soliloquizing, father fashion, about his oldest boy, had forgotten Kate's share in the business. It was more dangerous women than Robbie's pretty, innocent, good Kate that the parents feared now: the "divorced lady" he had danced with on the boat, the students and visitors in the French city. Everyone laughed at the idea of handsome, fascinating Tom Cunning-

ham in Paris. Everyone, that is, except his father and mother. Had he fallen in love with a model, yet? asked the world, cheerfully. Every hint of it was like a knife in Mollie's heart.

Why should he fall in love with a model—a divorced woman—a mannikin? she would ask herself, sick at heart. But ah, why not? Why not? Why not? the agonizing counter questions came. Suppose the lad was being coarsened, was becoming familiar with impurity and sin and all the hideousness of the world?

Mollie listened to the children, half smiled. But her heart was heavy with forebodings. Ah, why in God's name had they let Tom go, away from his mother's prayers, his father's good, clean example, and the friendship of this beautiful, pure, clever good girl, who might have dropped into his hand like the exquisite fruit she was?

Well, Tom would be back, please God, in time to win her. And Cecy shouldn't be whisked into the convent in any such precipitous fashion as she so fondly anticipated—that was flat. She should wait until the fall, at least. So that it would all be as it had been for so many years, the Cunninghams and Kate all together for the summer, strawberries and peaches and broad hats, at the camp where they went every year, among the pines of Lake Tahoe.

Aunt Allie was telling a story. The youngsters were listening to it for perhaps the hundredth time, but enthralled all the more for that. Aunt Allie's language, in the excitement of the narrative, reverted a trifle to the vernacular, but nobody noticed it.

"She see this feller—a great brute of a bloodhound!—trackin' her t'roo the deep bogs itself, and over a little cool of rocks that you'd not notice come daytime, but this was gloamin'. Her heart tuk a great lep in her side, and she says, 'If I run, he'll get me two little lady goats, that's worth their own weight in new shillin's, an',' she says, 'God knows will I drop me baby, runnin', and dash the brains out of him, the way I'd be flingin' him on a rock!' Wit' that, she grabbed the baby closer, and she tuck a little noose she had, and trun it over the little lady goats, an'

she give a look back an' the dog was clost upon her, with the big drippin' muzzle of him clost to the sod——"

"This was Grandma, Mama!" Ellen interrupted, excitedly, catching her mother's eye. Mollie nodded, she had known the story herself, when she was Ellen's age. "Come to the fire part, Aunt Allie!" Ellen charged the narrator eagerly.

The fire, introduced with the phrase, "an ould lad in a cassock nursin' a few brands of peat," duly came in, and the dog was worsted, and the itinerant monk looked at the baby, and said he would live to be a saint. "And a saint my brother Thomas was, if ever there was one," Aunt Allie ended with tears.

"Pop all alone?" Martin, with one of his unexpected flashes of thoughtfulness, asked then.

"No. Jawn Kelly come in, they're talking," Mollie answered, bestirring herself, and her armful of sleeping baby, none the less. And anybody noticing Kate then would have seen her colour change, her whole being spring into electrified tension, and relax again.

But nobody did, and presently Cecy began desultorily to prepare for bed, and Mollie, sending the younger children away, went downstairs. Kate sat on, with Allie, feeling the pounding of her own heart, conscious that every fibre of her being was dragging toward the man who did not want her, who did not know she was alive.

Was there any valid reason why she should not go downstairs? Would he go, without her catching a glimpse of him? Her hands were cold, and her mouth dry; she felt sick with suspense.

"Mollie's a great one to change her mind," Aunt Allie, who often made common cause with Kate, commented mildly but significantly, when they were alone. "She and Pete are worried now that Tom doesn't want to come home. I don't know what would hurt him, over there. They say they're all Catholics, with none of this New Thought and all the rest of it! He'll do worse here than there, I say. Leave him be. They were very my-bread-and-your-butter last year," Aunt Allie added, "but they'd be glad if you'd have him now, Kate."

"Oh, Aunt Allie!" the girl whispered, with a suffocated laugh. What was John Kelly doing, saying, looking, thinking, downstairs? Her beautiful young body was twisted as if on the rack; as she sat apparently composed on the couch electricity seemed to run in her veins, and not one fibre of her entire being was still. She half rose, alert eyes on the door; sank back again. She heard the front door slam, or thought she did. It was all over, he was gone. "What's 'my-bread-and-your-butter' mean?" she asked almost at random, as Cecy, brushing her hair, returned in her wrapper and slippers.

"That's the old country couple who thought nobody was good enough for their daughter," Miss Cunningham elucidated, readily, "because she had three hundred pound. Finally they married her to a very good feller that didn't have much, and she begun by boastin' very vaingloriously of this and that she'd brought along with her. 'Oh, are you usin' the chair my ma give me?' she'd say, and 'Them chickens of mine will come in handy for the eggs they'll be layin',' and so on and on, until me young lad had all he could bear of it.

"Well, didn't he ask her father and mother would they dine with him and his young wife, and down they set to a very good meal, and this young fellow begun on them the same way. 'Will you have some of me wife's chicken with my bread sauce and a a glass of my cider?' he'd say. 'Take one of me forks, won't ye, and try one of me wife's pickles with it. Pass some of your bread and some of my butter to your mama, my dear,' he says. So that was the way he cured her," Allie concluded with relish, "that she'd never shame him again, and a good wife she made him, and they said when she died—it was the bitter winter time —that the corpse would keep, and 'twas all the priest himself could do that the husband would consent she'd be buried at all."

"Kate," Mrs. Cunningham, somewhat breathless from the climb upstairs, said in the doorway. "Go to bed, Mart, for goodness' sake, and you too, Ellen!" she added, in a disapproving undertone to the younger children, who had once more gathered about their aunt and cousin. "You'll have that stomach bilious-

ness on you again," she warned the younger child. "Kate, Jawn Kelly's going to take you home, so get your hat," she finished.

"Oh, he doesn't have to!" Kate expostulated, turning scarlet.

"Well, your uncle passed the remark—— That's not worth mendin', Allie," Mrs. Cunningham said, sitting down. "Throw them out when they get like that."

"Give them to the Sisters, they'll make them like new!" Miss Cunningham substituted, with her odd air of resentment at any suggestion from Mollie. "Just because your children can afford new, it's no less a sin that you should throw——"

"I can get home alone, my gracious!" Kate said, uncomfortably, buttoning on her old coat.

"Well, your uncle passed the remark that you'd soon be goin', and Jawn says he was goin' your way." Mrs. Cunningham raised her full, firm face up to left and right, and Ellen and Mart kissed her good-night again from behind. "Or else it was your uncle suggested it," she continued, vaguely and Kate's face, upon which a sort of starry pallor had shone like a light, flamed suddenly again.

Cecy clung to her. "Kate, we'll have only a few more nights! Come to-morrow night, can't you, and sleep with me? Can she, Mama?"

"Indeed she can," Mollie agreed, cordially. "But we may keep her here much longer than she thinks!" she added, with a significant glance at Cecy. Cecy's sensitive little face flushed quickly.

"Mama, how do you mean?" she exclaimed.

"Never mind now," Mollie temporized, soothingly. "We'll have to talk it all over."

"Talk it all over!" echoed Cecy, aghast. "But, Mama—but, Mama—we *did* talk it all over! You said, and Papa himself said——"

"There's no use distressin' yourself, it'll all be as Papa decides," her mother began, nervously.

"Oh, Papa!" murmured Cecy, breathing again. "He said——"

"As I and Papa decide," Mollie continued, magnificently.

"And it may be weeks, and it may be—— But run along, Kate, and give my love to Aunt Maggie and Grandma," she interrupted herself. Kate had a last impression of Cecy's outraged countenance, Aunt Mollie's unsuccessful effort to appear quite poised and cool, and Aunt Allie's triumphant and scandalized astonishment, as she went out into the hall.

A light was always burning in the chapel, and upon a sudden impulse Kate went toward it, and slipped to her knees upon a *prie-dieu* before the little altar. Her heart was pounding so violently and her senses were in such a whirl of confusion that she could formulate no coherent thought, much less prayer.

"Oh, God, make him like me!" she said, a dozen times, before she went slowly downstairs.

Slowly, and with a wait on the second landing. The wide hall below was dimly lighted, a gush of brighter light came from the sitting room, and Kate could hear the men's quiet voices.

They nodded as she came in, continued their talk. Kate sat down in a big chair, and stared at the fire.

"Why not get hold of that fellow from Marysville yourself, Mr. Cunningham, and maybe have him handle it through the Sacramento store?"

"And then have the Red Bluff place, too?"

"Well, they did very well there this year."

"They done more business there last year than the whole business done here and everywhere else, ten years ago! Who was it told me that, Jawn? Somebody did," Peter said in satisfaction.

"Exactly," said Jawn Kelly's fine, quiet voice.

Kate looked full at him; he was half turned toward her uncle, and she saw his profile. John was olive-brown in complexion, with black eyes and a crop of satiny hair that rose thickly from his broad forehead and retreated in deep, even scallops, persistently curly despite brushes and cold water. He was of a good height, splendidly muscular and broadly built; he looked squarely at his employer as he talked to him, not smiling often, but occasionally breaking the seriousness of the conversation with a boyish, bashful grin that was gone almost before it was formed.

A fire was drowsing behind the polished steel bars of the grate, for the spring evening was chilly. Kate liked this room best of all downstairs, although it was only half the size of the magnificent dining room, and naturally had not the formal qualities of the parlours. Mollie's parlours were full of vases and onyx, mirrors and gilt chairs, satin furniture and ormolu tables. There were life-sized statues in the parlours, and standing lamps.

But here in the sitting room a homelier note of comfort prevailed; Miss Alcott's books were to be found face downward on the davenport, and Paul's baby chair had its own place among the larger chairs. Music coasted from the square piano, and Mollie had tucked a little cross of yellowing blessed palm into a picture frame on the mantel, the frame that held a photograph of the children, taken ten years before. Tom was a splendid grave little First Communicant of twelve in the picture; Cecy a spiritual ringletted creature of nine in striped stockings; Martin a stout five, in a frilled embroidery collar and more curls; and, seated in Cecy's lap, all ribbons and dimples, the beautiful baby, Daisy, who was destined to slip away from the conscientious little sisterly arms so soon.

There were other photographs in the room: Mollie herself in her first fur coat and a wide plumed hat; goggling babies of all types, many with their plain-haired, anxious-looking young mothers; Cecy's Confirmation picture; and a truculent, crimped photograph of Allie, who threatened almost every day to "throw the thing into the fire."

"Well," said John Kelly, presently, with his friendly look for Kate, "I'm keeping Miss Kate here waiting. How goes the world with you?"

"The world always goes well with that one," Peter answered, affectionately, as Kate, trying to think desperately of just the right bright word in answer, conveyed the impression of being tongue-tied. "Kiss me, Catherine!" he commanded.

"Good-bye, Uncle Pete," Kate murmured, clearing her throat. She laid her flushed, lovely cheek against his for a moment, smiled at John, and preceded him to the big, gloomy front door.

The heroine of a hundred conquests, she simply could not think of anything to say. What to say—what to say—what to say——

"I was just thinking how long it was since I've seen you, Miss Kate. Wasn't it Christmas?"

"Yes, I guess it was." No guesswork about it for Kate; she could have told him that that meeting had been supremely unsatisfactory, she could have told him exactly what he had said to her, and she to him, in the dullness and confusion of a large family party.

They walked in silence to the corner, stood under the street light waiting for the car. Kate hummed. Suddenly both spoke together.

"I beg your pardon——"

"No, you——"

"No, you——"

"I was just going to say that the cars never seem to be here when you want them." She halted. They interrupted each other again. "We just missed one!" Kate added. "But I interrupted you?"

"I was just thinking how lovely it is to-night; I like the Mission," John said. "In the spring you smell flowers here——"

"Lilacs," Kate supplied, looking up at the stars.

"Do you like the country?" the man asked.

"Well, I never lived there. Well, I did when I was a little baby," Kate remarked, with unbelievable dryness and difficulty. "But my mother and father died when I was quite young, and then my grandmother took me. I don't remember the country. We lived in Alameda."

"Here we are," John exclaimed, as the trolley hummed into view. "I'll tell you a very nice ride," he said, when they were wedged into a small seat outside, in the dark. "The scenic route to the beach, that's a beautiful ride. Don't you think so?"

He paid their fare as he spoke, and he did not ask for transfers. A dozen men Kate knew well would have taken transfers as a matter of course, and then coaxed her to take that same beach ride on such a golden spring night! They had only to

stay where they were for a few blocks farther, and change at Sutter Street.

It never occurred to him! The girl's face burned. She turned the full battery of her glorious blue eyes upon him; he was so close that almost without moving she could have kissed that hard brown face of his, with its straight nose and thin-chiselled lips, and the burning, boyish black eyes. He wore shabby gloves; Kate had forgotten hers.

"Mrs. Cunningham gave me those gloves at Christmas," John said, perhaps seeing her glance at them. "And I took it as a hint that she'd like me to wear them."

Kate grinned, plunged her own bare hands deep into her coat pockets. Why on earth couldn't she talk to-night? He would think she was half-witted.

"Stop at Turk," John directed the motorman. They were almost home. A glimpse of him on Christmas Day, and this was April! And Kate was twenty-one; in a few years it would be too late.

If she only dared say, "Let's hope we continue to see each other at least once every six months, John!" Did she call him John, anyway? If only she could laugh naturally and say, "Well, seeing each other this often there'll certainly be no talk about us, will there?"

Silently she walked at his side. They had taken the wrong car, in their nervous anxiety to take any car, and had two blocks, instead of a hundred feet, to walk. Kate prayed as she went: "God—make him interested in me!"

"Miss Cecilia doesn't look very well just now, does she?"

An opening at last. Her words came in a rush.

"She's terribly worried for fear—I guess you know that she wants to enter the convent? She's afraid Uncle Peter won't let her."

"I thought that was a year ago," John commented, slowly.

"He made her wait a year. But it's almost up now. Oh, God, have something happen to make him interested in me!" Kate said only the first two phrases aloud; the third rose silently in her heart.

"He spoke to me about it last spring. He's not spoken of it since," John said, briefly, after a slight pause.

"Well, she thinks he'll let her—next week," Kate assured him, mercilessly.

"She seems pretty young," the man offered, hesitatingly.

"Oh, I don't know. Cecy's twenty. Girls get married at that age!" Kate reminded him, airily. She was almost at her ease, spurred by the bitter sting of his interest in Cecy.

"Yes, that's so," John admitted, thoughtfully.

They turned Kate's corner.

"My God in heaven have mercy on us all!" the girl said, in a strangled voice. And she and John began to run.

The whole shabby block was alight. Fire engines were coughing and drizzling midway in the row of humble houses and cottages, and the unearthly red eyes of the hook-and-ladder wagon and the hot glow of intermittent flames illumined black and surging forms that moved and shouted, and picked out the white faces of a tensely watching crowd of boys and men, held in check by the police.

Kate rushed up, felt somebody's strong arm about her, caught a policeman by the arm.

"It's my grandma—it's my house—my God——!"

"It's only your shed roof cot, Kate!" shouted a perspiring and shirt-sleeved man, joining the group that immediately formed about her. "Your grandma's all right, she was givin' the boys what-for a minute back! It was Maloney's stable begun it, and they say the white funeral horses is burnt alive, God help the poor creatures, but your grandma and Miss Maggie was here a few minutes back. There's not a stitch of har'rm done your house, glory be to the everlasting glory of God Almighty!"

"You'd wondher," said a shrill, complaining voice, making itself heard through the general uproar, "you'd wondher that if me little place hasn't a stitch of hur'rt done to it, that thim lads wit' the hose would employ thimselves betther than they'd fill me little kitchen wit' their dir'rty watther."

The owner of the voice, a small and wizened woman of sixty-five or seventy, with a shawl wrapped well about her head and

shoulders, now looked with sharply blinking eyes at the group and said dispassionately: "Well, Kate."

"Grandma!" Kate exclaimed, embracing her thankfully. "My God, what a scare I got!"

"Aw-w-w-!" said all the boys in the crowd, disgustedly, in chorus, as a final inundation of the hose completely doused the last remnants of the flames. Darkness fell upon the surging masses of machinery and humanity, except when motor lights shone upon writhing and snakelike lengths of hose.

"Oh, Kate, we had a terrible time!" sobbed her Aunt Maggie, in easy tears. "Charley and Mama and I were in the kitchen——"

"And hadn't I run in to ask your mama how her rheumatism was," said a stout big motherly woman, solemnly. "I wasn't gone ten minutes when the whole thing broke out! I says to Nellie, when I got home: 'My God,' I says, 'it's a funny hour of night for Maloney to be cleaning his stable,' I says. With that Nellie looked out of the window, and the baby at her breast, the little innocent, 'Oh, God, Mary,' she says, 'the city's on fire!' With that my first thought was your poor old grandma, Kate, and I run out—look, in me old slippers, for I was changing me shoes——"

"Charley and Mama and I were in the kitchen, and Harry hadn't come in yet," Maggie Walsh said, shaking, and in a high, strained voice. "And Mama was just saying, 'Where's Kate, that she wouldn't be home——'"

"Maloney's took it very cool," a pimpled young boy said with something like regret.

"That's all, Mary, you've seen your fire, so now let's get out," said a male voice decisively, in the dark. Groups began to filter away; maternal voices here and there could be heard calling: "Hoo-hoo, Mar'gret! Em, have you Georgie? Hoo-hoo!"

The night air smelled of smoke and wet wood; as the unearthly lights faded, they could again see the quiet stars winking overhead. With a great snorting and puffing the fire motors turned and went away.

"The Chief was here, whoop! how he come sailin' around

the corner," exulted some small boy. "Le'go, Ma," he whined, departing.

"They say there's a terrible lot of fires lately," bemoaned some old woman's gentle voice.

"Your lights light, Mrs. Walsh!" sang out an officious youngster. "Me and Joe King went into your kitchen——"

"I'll bet me lights light, and I'll bet you young ones thraipsed all over the place while you was about it!" Kate's grandmother said, as she indignantly wended her way back into her own domain. "Look what they done to me!" she said, in a sort of stupefied wail, entering her kitchen.

"Well, leave it to them!" Kate said, with a great burst of laughter.

The dangling electric lights were indeed uninjured, and by their harsh glare the reëstablished family could look aghast upon the ruins about them. In their enthusiasm the fire department had turned more than one spurting hose into the little place, had smashed more than one of the small window-panes.

The stove stood in a pool of black water, the table had been upset, and salt and sugar had streamed from their homely receptacles to mingle with the broken brown Rebecca teapot upon the floor. Some officious meddler, mounting the roof to inspect the chimney, had been responsible for the curly drifts of soot that wavered and fled before the draught from the opened door; the kettle had been overturned upon the cold stove, and water dripped forlornly to the worn linoleum mat.

Kate, John, Maggie Walsh, a tall stout bald man without a collar, whom John had just identified as Kate's Uncle Charley, and the angry little old woman, stared at the kitchen and then at each other.

"Well, they done it good whilst they was about it!" commented Maggie.

"You can't stay here to-night, Ma, I'll not permit it, it's not safe," Charley Walsh uttered, pompously. "I'll take you myself to some hotel."

Maggie looked somewhat impressed at this. That Charley

had been a burden upon his mother and sisters all his fifty-two years made it none the less touching to Maggie that his heart was simply broke for poor Ma, the night they had the fire in Maloney's barn, and didn't he want to take her to a hotel? Maggie would add this detail to the solemn story of the night whenever she told it.

Kate shot her big, fat uncle a mother's look, a look all amusement and indulgence. And John Kelly saw it.

"Charley and I were here in the kitchen, and Ma was going to bed," Maggie was beginning again, on her high wail. "And Charley says, 'Why isn't Kate home? I'm going to 'phome Pete,' he says, and with that——"

"Who do they think they are, them hose and ladder boys?" Mrs. Walsh demanded, upon a hard, loud tone. "Is Jimmy Daley the Pope, that he'll scare a God-fearing woman out of bed in the middle of the night like a coney that'd run out of a burrow itself?"

"I didn't know that was one of the Holy Father's privileges." John, raising the table, observed in an aside to Kate.

"Nor I. Live and learn," Kate murmured in response, with her delicious laugh. It was the first time they had joked together; she loved to see him flush so redly, and hear him laugh that reluctant laugh that seemed shaken out of him almost against his will.

"Leave it be, Mr. Kelly, there's no use at all in your doing anything," Maggie protested. "It'll be weeks before we get it into any kind of shape again."

"Leave it just as it lays," Charley Walsh said in a majestic voice. "You carry some fire insurance, don't you, Ma? You leave it be, and I'll have O'Connor up here to-morrow morning. Don't touch it. You'll have it all back in damages."

"Thank God my brother's the one to know just how to handle all such things, that'd be Greek to me," Maggie said piously to John, with deep satisfaction. "Charley has a regular gift for a title or a mortgage or whatever, and indeed my father did before him!"

"I happen to know the adjuster well—drinking with him yesterday," Charley Walsh admitted, modestly. "Don't touch it, Kate!"

"But we can't leave it like this!" Kate protested. "Where'll we get coffee in the morning?"

Her uncle nodded cryptically. "Leave that to me. We'll step round to Farley's in Fillmore Street," he announced, magnificently.

"Well, if the police and the Mayor will keep out of me room so that I'll get me beads said, I'll go to bed!" remarked the old lady, witheringly.

"I could do with a good hot cup of coffee now!" Kate chanced to say, cheerfully

"Suppose you and I go round to Farley's and celebrate the fire?" John suggested, with his pleasant, almost bashful manner. Kate's eyes danced.

"You might ask Ken, there, would he send me back a pot of coffee," Kate's uncle suggested delicately, and Kate felt suddenly cold and weary. Of course he would end by going with them, the girl's heart said resentfully. Leave it to Uncle Charley!

"I won't go with you, you won't want me," Maggie said, pessimistically. "Unless I don't know whether your grandma would like your going around there so late with a young man," she added, hesitatingly. Kate felt an impulse toward murder. Grandma object! Why, she had been to Farley's with every one of twenty boys, and Grandma had paid no attention whatsoever!

Crimson with nervousness and anxiety she said: "We'll be right back."

"Insurance or no insurance," Maggie pleaded, with a deprecatory smile, "I think I'll have to make myself some coffee here, then. I feel real gone. I guess I had a good deal more scare than I thought, Kate not being here for the worst of it."

"Oh, come with us," John urged her. And Kate felt that she actually hated her good aunt when Maggie said, smilingly:

"Oh, say, listen, I'll be in your way!"

Be in their way! If looks could have withered, Maggie would

have shrivelled away under Kate's keen glance. But, upon John again inviting her, Maggie somewhat simperingly joined them.

"I think I'll go with you. I won't have anything to eat, but if I have to see O'Connor, it means I've got to get up in the morning," Uncle Charley now said, rather loftily. John and he led the way, and Kate's aunt took her arm, and snuggled up to her companionably, as she and Kate followed.

"My dear," murmured Aunt Maggie, "I hope we're not butting in! But you'll have to grant it's out of the common, driven out of the house with a fire scare, even though glory be to God eternally, none of us were killed outright!"

They went around the corner and into Farley's, a small, dimly lighted restaurant in whose window an aged Chinese was frying oysters. There was a narrow counter in front of him, furnished with bowls of small crackers and bottles of catsup and salt, but the Walsh party penetrated into the body of the establishment where there were small tables.

A big Irishman, in a dirty, thick white linen coat, wiped the table before them, snapped up a single electric light, and greeted Charley.

"Hello, Charley."

"Hello, Ken," said Charley, gratified.

"Some fire you folks had to-night. Gene was tellin' me about it," said Ken, genially. "Old lady get a shock? I hope not."

"Mama was scared almost to death," Maggie said, solemnly. "Her and my brother and I were in the kitchen; well, no, to be exact my mother had gone to bed. But my niece here——"

"What'll you have, Mr. Walsh?" John, the spattered card in his hand, was murmuring. "Coffee, Miss Kate? Miss Walsh, we're all having coffee. How about you?"

"I don't care what I have," Maggie said, heartily, "except that it's something hot to stay my stomach, for upon my word and honour I feel exhausted with the danger we were in."

"How about scrambled eggs? Miss Kate and I are having scrambled eggs," John suggested. Kate looked at his kindly, earnest face, a little flushed now with hospitality, and from him

to her relatives, and she bitterly wished that she were dead. Other girls had homes, like Cecy's beautiful home, had mothers and fathers to stand back of them. She had Aunt Maggie, grizzled, her crimps coming straight and her hat on crooked, and big Uncle Charley, sprawling himself and his spotted tie and his blond, freckled, fat hands across the table!

"I don't think I'll have anything but the coffee, unless it's a few fried oysters, Ken," Uncle Charley said, with an air of conceding even this much appetite to the wishes of his host.

"If you have fried oysters I will, too," Maggie amended her order.

"And the scrambled eggs?" John asked her.

"Oh, good gracious, what kind of an appetite do you think I have!" Maggie protested, delightedly. John smiled sympathetically at Kate, and was struck by the quality of her beauty and gentleness and weariness.

"Kate, you've got a smooch acrost your face!" Aunt Maggie told her, following the look.

"I shouldn't wonder!" Kate answered, too tired even to smile.

The eggs and oysters and the smoking hot coffee had arrived and were in process of being slid before their prospective consumers by Ken, when the party was joined by another of Kate's uncles, Harry Walsh, a gentle, also bald man, of almost forty, but small and nervous, where Charley was large, soft, and pompous, and, on this occasion, slightly intoxicated.

"My God, Maggie," said the newcomer, in tears, "this is a fearful thing. Ma might have been burned alive on us! My mother is the dearest thing in God's world to me," he said, solemnly, to John. "That little lady is all my world. Where were you and Charley and Kate, Maggie," he added, mildly querulous, "that the fire department would break in on her?"

"Oh, we've had a terrible night of it, Harry!" Maggie began, with her eyes filling again. "I guess there was seven or eight hundred come to watch it. Maloney's out three thousand dollars, someone was telling me, and the Chief and all! First thing we knew, Ma and Charley and I were in the kitchen, Kate was over to Pete's——"

"You'll have some coffee with us, Mr. Walsh?" John asked, patiently. "We're all sort of celebrating our narrow escape!"

"I was with a friend, d'ye see?" Harry said, confidentially, in his ear. "A grand feller, mind you. His wife," he added, delicately, with a precautionary glance toward Kate, "she left him. Left him," said Harry, his eyes watering, "a man that never done a mean thing in his life! He had Bright's Disease ever since he went into the Spanish War, to fight for his country, and he lost his only child two years ago! You'd feel sorry for him——"

John glanced again toward Kate. But she was sitting with her elbow resting on the table, her cheek in her hand, and her thick lashes lowered. Her sombre gaze was upon the spotted, damp, and rumpled tablecloth.

The coffee revived everybody, and Maggie and her older brother got into a cheerful gale of laughter and conversation. Harry drank strong black coffee sulkily, making occasional side remarks of a pessimistic nature to John.

"Do you know my father was Crocker's partner," Harry said, darkly; "my father ought to of been one of the richest men in this town!"

"Is that so?" John asked, with a glance at Kate. She raised heavy eyes, smiled. He had a sudden impulse to lay his hand for an instant over her own, where it lay idle beside her plate, and to give a second's sympathetic pressure.

"Pa was too honest, he never would have been a rich man the longest day he lived!" Maggie added, readily. "My father was a man thought well of the len'th and brea'th of the state," she went on, warmly. "He was his own worst enemy where money was concerned; did he have it, there was nobody could ask him for it he wouldn't hand it out to them, and with a 'God bless you' at that! 'The gates of heaven are standin' open for him,' said Mother Margaret Mary herself when he lay dyin' and my own mother layin' like a curd in the next room, the way we didn't know which one of them would go first! You'd never see a bigger funeral than my father's, Mr. Kelly, unless it was a convention or a president coming to town," Maggie ended, with

emotion, "and didn't we lay out my brother, that was Kate's father, Robbie Walsh, that was really my half-brother, but by reason of Ma marrying twice he always called her 'ma' to the day of his death, but three weeks and five days later?"

And Maggie stopped for want of breath, and raised her coffee cup, to look pathetically at John over its thick brim.

"You've surely had your share," John sympathized, seriously. During this rambling monologue he had been concerned to discover that Kate, whom he had always seen so self-reliant and happy, was hiding wet eyes.

Harry had quite frankly gone to sleep, his head against the wall, and Maggie, noticing him, apologized to the best of her ability.

"You'll have to excuse my brother, Mr. Kelly," Maggie said, "he shouldn't of followed us here. But he's very tender-hearted, and he has a weak stomach, and when he's"—and Maggie's significantly raised eyebrow and tightened mouth added—"had a little too much"—" he's like this," she went on, aloud. "He'd never raise his hand to a fly," she added, loyally. "But"—again the eyebrow spoke volumes—"poison to him!" Maggie finished, hardly sounding the words as she formed them with her lips. "He ought never to touch it!"

"Come on, Harry, come on, Harry," Charley was saying. Harry roused himself with some reluctance, and asked permission to stand treat for the party. "Bring me that bill, Ken. Bring me that bill!" he kept saying, heavily.

"It's all paid, Harry dear," Maggie said, anxiously accompanying him. "Mr. Kelly paid for it all, dear, and now next time he'll have to have a little supper with us!"

Kate did not speak, and although John ranged himself beside her in the dark street, she seemed entirely unconscious of his presence.

"This fire seems to have upset them," he murmured, kindly.

The girl made a little sound that might have been a brief laugh or a sniff; John glanced at her sharply, and in the mild moonlight he saw that the beautiful head was carried high, and there was a glint of tears on her thin young cheeks.

"We'll take Harry in, and leave you to say good-night to your young man; don't hurry, dear," Maggie suggested, with a great air of consideration and sympathy, at the gate. But Kate was beyond all desire to see John Kelly alone now; her one shamed and desperate prayer was that she would never see him in this life again. She gave him her cool hand, said a brief good-night, and accompanied her sorry group of kinspeople into the house.

The stuffy cottage rooms still smelled of smoke and acrid, singed wet wood. Old Mrs. Walsh slept on an extension lounge in the parlour, with an enlarged crayon portrait of her late husband cheerful in curled hair, curled moustache, and checked suit, looking down upon her. Kate and Maggie shared a double bed in one bedroom, unless it chanced to be rented, when they occupied the dining room; the brothers had a similar bed in the other. There was no bathroom in the cottage, but a washroom beyond the kitchen, opening on a porch.

When Kate and her Aunt Maggie returned, dripping, and with braided hair, from the washroom, Harry was already deeply and noisily asleep, and Charley was smoking a cigarette in the dining room, as he awaited their convenience.

"Well, I hope we didn't scare the life out of that nice young Mr. Kelly," Maggie, who had had reason to be disturbed by her niece's unnatural calm, said a little nervously, in their room. "Maybe it was terrible, all of us going along to Farley's that way, but what with the fright and all, I felt all at my wits' end! When he asked me so nice, the first thing I said was 'yes', and then I couldn't back out. I never knew Charley was coming, and as for poor Harry—but the way he talked I know he saw that Harry—felt bad. You don't think," she had to have it out, "you didn't mind my going, Kate?"

"It didn't matter." Kate, on her knees, clean and sweet in her plain nightgown and with a great rope of golden-brown hair hanging over her slender shoulder, said lifelessly. Her eyes stung with tears she would not let fall, her voice was thick.

"Kate!" Maggie exclaimed, puzzled. "You don't like young Kelly, do you?"

Kate raised weary eyebrows, opened the worn, thin prayer-book she had laid before her on the bed.

"It wouldn't matter much if I did, I suppose," she said, dully.

Maggie, honestly concerned, came about to Kate's side of the bed, and sat down beside her niece.

"Well, lovey, we don't have fires every night," she began, apologetic and distressed.

"No," Kate agreed, perversely, linking her slender fingers before her, and refusing to smile or look up. "But we have dirt, and poverty, and Uncle Harry getting drunk, and Uncle Charley——" "bumming meals off everybody," she was going on. But with an actual physical effort she stopped herself, and remained mutinously silent, staring away from Maggie across the the wide, soggy bed.

"Now, Kate, you have a great deal," Aunt Maggie began. "Haven't you your Uncle Pete and Aunt Mollie that think the world and all of you, and your grandma that's almost a saint? And though the boys are not ones to make money, you'll never find a quicker mind than Charley Walsh has got, and pure—a priest told Ma once that our boys had the souls of children! My goodness, if you think you have troubles, Kate Walsh, what about me that was engaged——"

"Oh, I'm sick of it, sick of it, sick of it!" Kate broke out, in a bitter tone, hardly above a whisper, and as if she spoke to herself.

"Kate," Maggie pleaded, patiently, after a frightened silence, "look at me, that was going to be married to Frank Cahill, and had my bans called and everything, and the news in the evening paper that he'd been drowned——"

"Oh, I'm sick of Frank Cahill!" Kate muttered, as her aunt paused, overcome.

Tears filled Maggie's eyes and her lips trembled. She went to her own side of the bed and Kate knew she was crying.

As the girl opened her "Imitation," disgust and impatience seized her like vertigo. Oh, horrible house, filled with poverty and laziness and stupidity and intemperance and dirt! Oh, dreary, ghastly life, that gave to some girls wealth and position,

and the love of the finest of men, and to other girls all the helpless and sagging humiliations of such a family as hers!

What kind of "shanty Irish" would John Kelly think them! Kate's young face burned. Not that it mattered—nothing mattered. What would he think of them! He was probably laughing at them. Not that it mattered.

She looked across at Maggie, who was saying her rosary, her tearful eyes tight shut, her lean elbows sunk into the shapeless surface of the bed.

"Aunt Maggie, I'm sorry I said that about Frank Cahill," Kate apologized, ungraciously. Maggie faintly shook her head, and a great gulp moved in her throat.

The girl suddenly rose to her feet, slammed the little book firmly down upon the table, and sprang into bed. She buried her head in the covers, lay there curled in a ball, overwhelmed by her own furious mood, and swept by bitter and confused heartache.

"Kate," Maggie said, solemnly, after a few brightly lighted, silent moments. "Didn't you read your 'Imitation'?"

"No," Kate said, briefly, from her cocoon.

"Catherine Walsh! I thought you were doing it every night this month, for an intention?"

"I was," Kate admitted, grimly, without stirring.

Maggie was stupefied. She finished her own prayers; tried again.

"Kate——" A pause. Then, sharply: "Kate——"

"Well, what is it?"

"Do you want to lose your intention?"

"No, and I'll never get it that way, nor for praying for it, and I'm sick and tired of praying!" Kate said, in angry tears. "And if you say another word to me, I'll get up and march out of this house, and I wish I was dead!" she finished.

Maggie was silent. She went to the window, dingily curtained in streaked and torn Nottingham lace, and opened it. She wound the nickel clock, and set it for seven, she snapped off the electric light that dangled nakedly in the centre of the shabby room.

"Kate dear," she said in the darkness, when she was in bed, "I was thinking that if I do good with my dressmaking this summer, we'll have some little dinner parties next fall. You'd like that, wouldn't you? I'll cook my chicken pie, that always comes out so good, and I'll tell you what we'll do—we'll ask that nice Mr. Kelly, shall we? Would you like that, Kate? It's only right that you should have your pleasures."

Kate lay motionless. Her heart was one great ache of pity and shame. Poor shabby Aunt Maggie, struggling in the dreary dining room with sewing machine and tissue-paper patterns, yet trying to plan so generously and spontaneously! Kate smelled, in the spring dark, the lemon that Maggie always kept to whiten her hands, and always lay rubbing upon them, when she first got into bed. She heard the click of Maggie's dental plate, about which her aunt was extremely sensitive, and which was only slipped into its place in a handleless teacup after the lights went out. And she heard Maggie say:

"I'm sorry about to-night, dear. Don't feel bad, Kate. We'll have some real good times if we don't have any sickness to put us back; this summer——"

Silence. Kate hated herself for breathing heavily as if asleep. But it seemed to ease the cruel hard pain in her own heart, somehow to lift the day's humiliating total of failures and shame, to hurt Maggie.

Her intention! She thought of it with a bitter, writhing motion of her lips. She had been praying, since Christmas, that somehow she and John Kelly would come to be friends! She had been reading a chapter of the "Imitation" every night, with that for her "intention"!

It was much later, after as painful a long hour of thought as her healthy youth had ever known, that she slipped cautiously from the bed and slid to her knees. The moon was gone now, and the world outside was chilly; it must be nearly two o'clock, Kate thought solemnly. It had been after midnight when they were drinking their coffee in that disgusting restaurant.

She would not read the "Imitation"; she was done with in-

tentions for a while! But she dared not sleep until she had said her prayers.

Afterward she went noiselessly about the bed, and leaned over Aunt Maggie. And instantly Maggie's lean, empty arms came up, and they kissed each other. Both faces were wet.

"Kate, dear—to have you unhappy—it kills me—you're all the world to me, dear——" Aunt Maggie whispered, crying.

"I'm a beast!" Kate whispered back. And purified and meek, and broken in body and soul, she crept into her own place, and gave one great sigh, and one deep sob, and was asleep.

CHAPTER V

THERE was great excitement in the Cunningham household on the night of the municipal ball. Only Cecilia and her father were attending, to be sure, and Peter's much considered, rehearsed, and discussed "speech" was to consume at most a mere three minutes; Peter was listed on the programme under the general heading: "Greetings from our new Commissioners: William Bundschu, George G. Potter, Peter J. Cunningham, J. M. Moretti."

Yet it was a pleasant and flattering event in Peter's life, and it was Cecy's first big party—and Cecy's last, if the girl herself, dressing now in her big, brightly lighted front room, had anything to say about it.

Neither Cecy's father nor her mother had had any idea, until this week, of the stubborn lines the little rosebud of Cecy's mouth could assume, nor the cold greyness that could film her honest young blue eyes. She wanted to enter the convent. Sister expected her. Everyone knew she was going to enter the convent. Cecy couldn't see why Mama and Papa, after all this time, should suddenly begin to object now.

Papa had said a year. Now the year was ended. Papa had expected her to change her mind, and she hadn't changed her mind. There was nothing more to be said.

Cecy's father and mother would gladly have agreed to the last clause; too much, far too much, had already been said! But, although their course and their daughter's looked so clear, and although they were not, in the sense of analysis and study, educated parents, each felt vaguely that there was more to a religious vocation than appeared in this case.

More than just childish good intentions and romantic youth; more than just wanting to become a postulant.

Cecilia, when all was said and done, was extremely young, even for twenty. She had a curious quality of unreality still, of ignorance, of untouchedness, and both parents, although they could not have expressed it, felt it strongly. She was too ready with her pat little consolatory phrases, too much engrossed in the thought of her curly braids, her plain serges, and sunlight falling in the convent chapel upon her veiled head.

"You'll miss your mother and sister," Peter warned her.

"Oh, Papa, but think of the wonderful mother and sisters I'll have all about me!"

"The time may come, lovey, when you'll want a home and babies of your own!"

"I'll have a whole classroom full of them!" And Cecilia would laugh the bright, confident, childishly ignorant laugh that made her father so profoundly uneasy. In his rather slow brain Peter sometimes mused about it. Could "them good Sisters," he wondered, really escape friction and petty worries, escape, in a word, reality? Well, maybe they could. Maybe they could. Maybe they could keep a child like this dear blue-eyed, curly-headed little saint of his always happy, always busy, always good.

His wife had carried a girlish innocence, ignorance, and purity triumphantly through experiences staggering to contemplate; she had remained mysteriously unstained through her girlhood in the slatternly house of Walsh, through her brothers' bouts with intemperance, through one or two experiences even more disillusioning, in the history of the "Walsh boys"; she had been a dignified young wife, she had faced dangerous confinements serenely, and she still could be shocked, and wince at certain words, as a girl might. Nobody talked coarsely or even carelessly before Mollie; Peter never told her even the most innocent of his friends' jokes.

Armed thus with some invisible protection, in all the soil and sordidness of the world, might Mollie quite unconsciously have given her daughter similar sheltering wings, wings that would hold little Cecy safe in her cloister?

"She'd take a chanct, marryin'," Peter reminded his wife.

"Yes, but there's real things right away, when you marry," Mollie answered, with unexpected shrewdness. "There's rent, and your family, and presents, and maybe your first one coming. But in the convent it's all in your mind, or your soul."

Mollie had been deeply impressed by the American "Mother Superior," one of whose rare visits to the convent had been paid this Eastertime. Mother Superior had been Mollie's school chum, Sarah Toosey, twenty-five years ago; she had lived over a grocery in Valencia Street. But she was a very important personage now. She was large, spectacled, brisk, quiet, authoritative in demeanour. She could estimate a rent, the site of a building, the potential qualities of a raw little girl, with the eye of an expert.

Mollie she had kissed on both cheeks, with tears of pleasure in her bright eyes; at Cecilia she had smiled shrewdly: "This is the good child that is waiting for Papa's permission, is it?" she had asked.

Cecy had been transported with ecstasy. But later, Mother Superior had assured Mollie, in twenty firm, regretful words, that she did not think the child had the true vocation.

"She's a good child, but it's *natural* goodness, Mollie. Sister tells me that your Cecilia was never disciplined or punished—never did a penance in her life. Let her try it, of course, if you like. But I think we had better wait to see what the Holy Spirit is going to do with her."

This had been a thunderbolt to Mollie; she had not dared to tell Cecy. It would cloud the girl's first happy days as a postulant, upset her and distress her as it was upsetting and distressing her mother. Mollie had been wavering before this, now she was in a wretched state of indecision.

Meanwhile Pete rehearsed his greeting, and Cecy's dress was finished, and the night of the Municipal Dinner and ball came. And with it came Kate and Maggie Walsh, to see Cecy in all her glory, and remain behind to dine quietly with Mollie and the children.

Kate, calling a joyous greeting in all directions, flew up to Cecy's room; the family began to filter through halls and doorways

in that direction. The May night was soft and bright, there was still lingering daylight in the streets.

But Cecy had the shades drawn, and the lights lighted, and was posed fixedly before her mirror, while her mother and Aunt Allie lifted the new dress above her head.

Her eyes moved toward Kate and Aunt Maggie in the mirror, as they entered, but she did not turn. Ellen and Mart and Paul, hanging upon the visitors, disposed themselves upon the sofa, and all eyes were fixed admiringly upon Cecy's young figure, in the satin petticoat and lacy corset-cover, and the cloud of gauze and glitter that was sliding slowly down over her raised bare arms.

"Mother of pearl, what a dress!" Kate said, under her breath.

"Do you like it, Kate?" Mollie asked, exhaustedly dropping her big arms, and panting, as Allie conscientiously scowled through her glasses at hooks and snaps. "I've fussed with it so and then we had to change the whole skirt, and poor Maggie coming back last night at eight o'clock—I'll never forget it of you, Mag—I know that——"

"Aunt Allie, ought that catch like that?" Cecy demanded, anxiously, looking down over her own shoulder.

"It's all right, dear. Just leave me hook it," Allie murmured.

"Mama, *is* it all right?" Cecy further demanded, unconvinced.

Aunt Allie gave place, and her mother and Aunt Maggie nervously examined the shoulder.

"It's caught in the lace there, Allie. It's all fixed, lovey."

"Well, I knew *that*," Aunt Allie said, witheringly, with a significant glance for Kate. "If you'd leave me finish it, before you began pickin' flaws in it——"

Cecilia had on her new white satin slippers, pearled with crystal beads. Her white silk stockings were new; everything she wore was new, and had been laid out on the bed since two o'clock, in careful order. She had no evening coat, and was originally to have worn her mother's heavy one, and later decided on Kate's, the old pink silk one with the swansdown collar.

But only an hour ago her father had brought her a new coat, in a big Emporium box, a coat of pale rose satin with a ravishing

soft high collar of white fur. Cecilia had never had so sumptuous a garment in all her twenty years. Quite pale with emotion she had tried it on, over her old house dress, and afterward had flung herself into her gratified father's arms, entirely unable to express her enthusiasm and gratitude.

It was already promised, in an aside, to Ellen, "when I enter," and Ellen had already whispered this great news to Kate. But Peter and Mollie did not know that, and both parents felt a deep satisfaction in Cecilia's reception of the gift.

"*Her* enter?" Peter, shaving, had said incredulously. And even Mollie had felt enormously reassured.

"There, now, how do you like it, Kate? How do you like it, Allie?" Mollie demanded now, as completely hooked and straightened, Cecilia revolved slowly before the mirror, and faced them with shy and yet deeply complacent eyes.

Pink gauze, silver gauze, pink roses and transparent silver lace, pink points standing out stiffly like the petals of a rose, and silver scallops lying flat against the smooth girlish breast. And above them, Cecy's round cheeks, flecked with gold freckles, blazing with excitement and self-consciousness, and Cecy's silky black curls all gathered under a knowing little silver band embellished with tiny satin roses.

"You look like a doll out of a box," Kate said, generously.

"Oh, Kate, I wish it was you going!"

"Not any more than I do, dear," answered Kate, and they all laughed.

"Try your new coat on over it, darling."

"Look at the way she puts it on, you'd think she was a duchess," Aunt Maggie said, admiringly. And indeed Cecy, inspired by her own elegance and beauty, had caught up the rose-pink garment with a real dash, and was looking coquettishly over the big white collar.

"Mag, you never made a prettier dress than that in your life!"

"Well, I don't know as I ever did. I kinder think now it would have looked good with the points hanging a little further down."

"Go show yourself to your papa," Mrs. Cunningham directed her eldest daughter, her tone brimming with pride.

"Don't she look too saucy in it?" Maggie murmured, as she left the room.

Kate and Ellen accompanied her across the hall, the others followed. Peter was struggling with his white tie before his mirror.

"Look here, Uncle Peter, what do you think of your daughter?"

"How do you like me, Papa?" And Cecy revolved again before him, demurely fanning open the beautiful coat, to display the pink and silver glories beneath.

"Well, say—well, I guess we've got a society lady here tonight, Mama, sure enough!" Peter said to his wife, raising his bushy eyebrows to their highest, and forming his freshly shaven cheeks and his big mouth into a whistling position. "You look very lovely, darlin'," he added, sincerely. "Kiss Papa. Mollie, have I got another of these ties?"

"Why don't you go down and show Bessy and Ida and Annie, they're so interested!" Mollie suggested in a coaxing undertone.

"Oh, Mama, I'd rather not!"

"Oh, come on!" urged Kate. And as the younger element streamed downstairs, Peter was left to wrestle with his tie, and Mollie and the other women went back into Cecy's room.

Presently the girl returned, trying to talk naturally and simply with the brimming sense of her own beauty and importance distracting her. The minutes dragged by, with the women's desultory conversation constantly coming back to Cecy and the dress, until Peter was heard shouting: "There's the car outside. Come on, Cecy!"

Cecy rose, and Kate picked up the coat. But first the younger girl moved quickly across the room and opened her wardrobe door. As the big, overweighted panels and mirrors swung out, they could see her neat dresses and skirts hanging within.

She caught out her plain little new serge, her postulant dress, and laid it for a moment to her glowing cheek.

"This is my *real* party dress!" Cecy said, half playfully, all impulsively. And with a flashing, serious look about the group, she slipped into her new coat and ran out to join her father.

"Her little convent dress, that's where her heart is!" Maggie said, laughing with wet eyes.

"That's all she cares about," Allie nodded solemnly. "Off to dances and balls, her heart is that of a saint, that one."

"The dear child, she don't seem able to think of nothing else!" Mollie said. But Kate, honest and clear-sighted, experienced a secret little feeling for Cecy that was new. For the first time she realized that her little cousin really had no vocation at all, nor anything else; that Cecy was simply a sweet, admiration-loving young creature charmingly playing a part.

"She'll not enter, but she'll get John Kelly yet!" Kate thought.

"Ma's all over that scare the other night," Mollie stated rather than asked, as they all wended their slow way downstairs. She had had the whole story several times; Mollie saw her old mother almost every day. But it would serve as conversational food for all time to come, none the less.

"Maloney come over to see her to-day, to ask about her insurance," Maggie said. "I told you that. Charley thinks Ma will get a hundred and seventeen dollars, for the shed. Lucky for her Nelsons kept their old Ford in there, these last few months, so Ma could swear that we had use for it."

"Oh, say, what'd the doctors tell Min Nelson?" Allie demanded, interestedly.

"They said they couldn't tell. But old lady White told Ma that Min's mother went the same way, only her lump was on the other side. Clara says she thinks Min knows, knows perfectly well. She says Min was over to Crowleys' the other day, and Gert Crowley was talking about poor Stella Mahoney——"

They were off. Kate played naughts-and-crosses silently with Ellen and Mart, exchanging comments in pantomime, as the conversation settled down to a steady gait that would only

be interrupted, but by no means destroyed, when Grace came to the door to say "Dinner is served when you are."

Cecy's place at the banquet was at the speakers' table; she felt a natural thrill of pride when her father was directed to find his name there, and when she followed him through a great banquet room that was already filling with men.

"You'll find your card marked 'Mrs. Cunningham,'" the delightful young man who guided them told her. "We thought it was your mother that was coming!"

"She doesn't care much for this sort of thing," Peter explained, with a benignant nod, and the young man nodded sympathetically too, as if he understood.

It was all exciting and novel; the long tables spread flat with flowers, the waiters threading the confusion, the men and women filtering their way through the chairs, looking for cards and reservations.

Cecy saw Elizabeth Hunter, who used to go to the convent, and was married now, and Elizabeth waved back smilingly. Cecy felt proud that Elizabeth should see her at the speakers' table, even though she was far down toward the end of it.

Peter was on one side of his daughter; on the other was a card saying "George F. Taylor." Cecy knew who he was, one of the richest men in the state, and with a wife who was a society leader.

"Papa——"

"Just a minute, dear. That gentleman wants to speak to me. What is it, Joe?" muttered Peter, moving away. Peter was in his glory, magnificent in evening dress, recognized everywhere, and in demand. "Wait until they get the coffee 'round, and then keep them moving!" Cecilia heard her father say. "You'll get these front tables out of here as quick as you can, Pontuni," he charged the head waiter.

"Yes, Mr. Cunningham. The minute you give me the signal, sir."

"Well, I or Mr. Forster will."

"Yes, sir. I'll be watching you both, sir." The head waiter

snapped his fingers, strained upon his toes to attract the attention of some underling far away. Peter turned back.

"What was it, lovey?"

"What are those big bags, hanging over the lights in the corners, Dad?"

"Those are for flashlights, dear."

"Papa, is this man next to me—look! It says 'George Taylor.' Is that the rich George Taylor?"

"That's the one. He gave the lot, you know, where we're going to build. But I guess you'll have a blank seat there; someone was telling me he was sick in bed. You're Mr. Taylor's boy, aren't you?" Peter added, in a friendly voice, as an irreproachably clad young man came to the chair next Cecy, and after a brisk inspection picked up the name card. "You don't remember me. Cunningham is my name."

"How do you do, Mr. Cunningham?" the youth said, easily, with a smile.

"My daughter, Miss Cunningham," Peter pursued.

"Miss Cunningham," Dion Taylor echoed again. "I'm here representing my father, and I wish devoutly that I had died in my happy innocent childhood!" he added, gaily, appreciative eyes upon Cecy. "I have a report to read."

"My father has to make a speech," Cecy stated, shyly, as Peter turned away again.

"Let's sit down and watch the animals come in," young Taylor suggested, amiably. He drew her chair out for her and they sat down.

Cecy had hitherto been only interested and amused; now, sitting so comfortably above the level of the main floor, looking down at the struggles of the later and less fortunate comers, and chatting with this delightful companion, she began to be really happy, with a queer breathless sort of happiness she had never known before.

Dion looked down at her firm, rosy, honest childish face, with its gold powdering of freckles; he liked the blue flame of her eyes when she raised them suddenly. The little breasts beneath the silver lace and pink gauze were flat and unformed, her arms had

the sweet softness and roundness of a child's arms. He liked the cadences in her voice, too, the lovely hint of a Celtic burr here and there. "Lord, what a little lily!" he said to himself more than once.

Dion Taylor was less than thirty. But he was a hundred years older than Cecilia in soul. He was handsome, brown-haired, tall, "taller than Pop and fully as tall as Tom," Cecy had already decided. He had laughing brown eyes and a sophisticated mouth. He wore his evening clothes as nobody else in the room could wear them, and his conversation smacked of the world: colleges, ocean liners, studios in Paris and New York. He was rich, he associated only with rich people, and was the youngest member of a very young firm of brokers.

Cecy looked up at him shyly, and he looked ardently down at her, and the old, old miracle had its way with them both. Presently they were no longer talking, they were murmuring, and Cecy was marking the table with little squares with her fork.

By this time most of the speeches had been made, and the room was a sea of confusion, with tables and chairs jammed together irregularly, and men sitting at all angles. Cecilia's heart had beaten hot and fast when her father stood up, and she had looked down at her locked hands in insufferable nervousness, and framed with her unconscious lips the phrases he had rehearsed before her only last night.

But Peter went successfully through his ordeal, and the loyal little daughter could breathe again.

"Papa, you were wonderful! You were the best of all."

"Oh, come, come. You mustn't say that. I had nothin' at all to do to-night! Sometimes they make me—— What is it, dear?"

"Papa, they're dancing beyond there, in the next room, and Mr. Taylor asked me to dance!"

"Well, go ahead, go ahead, lovey. You don't want to hear this about the franchises—no, of course you don't. Have a good time!"

Just threading the crowd with young Mr. Taylor was thrilling; he was so slim, so elegant, so tall, he made his way so deftly.

He did not even look at Cecy as they reached the fringes of the crowd, he simply extended his arms in a businesslike way, and Cecy went into them.

Dion Taylor danced beautifully; Cecy felt that she had known he would. Without effort, smoothly, he seemed to be carrying her about like a piece of thistledown. It was evident that he liked to dance, for he did not talk as they circled and swayed, and he applauded vigorously when the music stopped.

Cecy started to applaud, too, saw that none of the other women did, and stopped abruptly, turning scarlet. Her companion saw her confusion.

"Clap if you want to," he said, carelessly. "What do you care what these poor simps do? Your little finger is worth more than the whole crowd put together!"

He said it so quietly, pocketing his handkerchief as he did so, and taking her coolly into his arms again, that Cecy was stirred to her soul. "Thank God I dance well—thank God I dance well!" she breathed, fervently, in the depths of her being. It was perhaps as sincere a prayer as she had ever uttered.

The dances were endless, each was followed by a dozen brief encores, yet when the first was ended, Dion made no move to leave her, but negligently remarked that the musicians would start up again immediately.

"And don't you want to dance with—somebody else?" the girl asked, shyly.

"Me? No," he answered, with a surprised glance. "I'm only staying on your account."

Again in his arms, Cecy was conscious of shaking and trembling, of the vague scent of him, his buttonhole and his fine linen, his fresh young face and the smell of his hair. He smiled down at her, after his last remark, and Cecy was emboldened to say provokingly, with her powdered, radiant little face close to his tall shoulder:

"But suppose *I* might?"

"You might what, Cecilia?" the man said without effort. "Be lucid, my child."

"Suppose *I* might want to dance with somebody else?" Cecy explained.

"We'll suppose nothing so idiotic," Dion answered, calmly. The music stopped, and sauntering leisurely along with the crowd and clapping briskly, he added, in a ruminative tone: "No, you like me better than any man you ever saw, and when you can dance with me, you'll not dance with anybody else! So that," he ended, opening his arms for the encore, "that's *that*."

It was all fairyland, the music, the lights, the scents and sounds that whirled about her in one glorious and golden haze. Cecy was transported to some country her foot had never touched before; yet she knew the language, and with great hungry breaths she drew in the enchanted air.

What was happening? Did he like her? Did most girls dance every one of their dances with the same man, at their very first party?

Dion took her to the lemonade bowl, and she drank nectar; he led her to a cooler hallway, and fanned her with his handkerchief, and talked to her, and his words were like magic words dripping with fire and starshine as they fell.

Her father with a strange man in tow found her here; it was midnight. Mr. Cullen, my daughter Cecilia. Mr. Cullen, Mr. Taylor. It was midnight, dear, and Mr. Cullen wanted a dance with her. Mr. Cullen knew her cousin Kate. And after this dance they must go.

Bewildered with pain and confusion, Cecilia changed dancing partners. Dion had disappeared; this horrible, perspiring, red-faced man was maundering on about Kate, like the fool he was. Cecilia hated him, she could hardly bring herself to speak to him.

"It's the same dance," he said, clapping.

"But I think Papa's waiting for me."

"Well, let's dance 'round to the door, anyway——"

She walked up to her father with a haughtily held head and hot cheeks.

"They're encoring it," said the offensive Cullen.

"Here's my coat ticket, Papa; do I get it, or do you?"

"I'll get it, dear. You finish your dance with Richard."

"Do you come often to parties, Miss Cunningham?"

"I didn't hear you."

"Do you like these big parties?"

"Oh, these parties. Oh. Well, I'm tired now, I guess."

"I almost called you 'Cecilia' when your father did, because we used to live out in the same block in the Mission. I went to school with your brother Tom, and I remember once you came over to our house, and my sister Mary took you home. You weren't but four——"

"I don't remember."

She went up to her father in the next interval.

"Papa, I'm kind of tired."

"Well, here's your coat then, lovey, and say good-night to Richard."

"Finish this with me, like a sweet girl——" She already knew the accents of that quiet, finished voice. Dion was behind her; in another instant they were out on the polished floor again.

Oh, exquisite happiness and confidence and normality returned! Her voice came naturally, her glances were balanced, poised, once more. Her feet were winged.

"Are you glad I waited for you, Saint Cecilia?"

"Yes." She looked up, against his shoulder, looked down.

"In the telephone book, of course?"

"Are—do you mean—oh, yes, of course we are!"

"Here's Miss Cunningham, danced to rags," Dion said, returning her to her father, and taking her coat to hold it charmingly. "Good-night, Mr. Cunningham, good-night, Mr. Cullen. Good-night——"

He had her little hand, he lingered just a second over it, and Cecy looked up like a wearied rose from the big white fur collar. Then he was gone.

She was silent in the limousine, silent when she got home. Her mother came into her room to kiss her, to unhook carefully the pink and silver dress.

"Quarter to one! Look at that now. And did you have a good time, my darling?"

"Lovely."

"And did you dance, dear?"

"Oh, yes, Mom." Cecilia opened her clean nightgown like the calyx of a lily; slipped her weary little body into it.

"She had young Cullen bowled over," Peter said, yawning, and removing his collar with a shriek of linen. "Don't send that to the wash no more, Mama," he directed, tearing it viciously in two. "For an hour he was hangin' around," he continued, "waitin' to meet her. He said she was for ever dancin'."

"Then you did have a good time, lovey?" Mollie repeated, surprised and delighted. "I thought you would, when you and Papa were so late."

Cecilia smiled, stepped out of the little ring of fragrant sweet clothing that slipped down under her nightgown.

"I said your decade for you," Mollie told her, lovingly superintending the final collapse between the smooth sheets.

"Oh, thank you, Mom——"

They were gone at last; she could hear their ruminative murmurs across the hall. The big room, with windows opened to the airy darkness of the night, was empty at last; she was alone, except for Ellen, whose bed was in a corner.

Cecilia settled herself upon her pillows, crossed her bare arms behind her head. She lay straight, motionless, utterly content. The panorama of the last few marvellous hours began to unroll itself smoothly, like some old Chinese scroll that is thinly wrapped length after shining length upon a polished wooden pole.

She was arriving at the banquet room, in her pink and silver dress. She was searching, in interest and yet with indifference, for her own place. A young, tall man was beside her, searching his own. Dion Taylor.

And then on—on—on, through all her treasury of remembered glorious moments. Cecilia had her favourites, and when, in the orderly sequence of her memories she found herself approaching the moment when Dion had bent upon her that quietly apprais-

ing look, when his voice had lowered itself upon that note of odd husky amusement, earnestness, mischief; when, at some word of hers as they danced, he had brought her whole body suddenly and firmly nearer his own, Cecilia would almost suffocate with sheer felicity.

She lay awake, quietly and deliberately, all night. Most of the time she was quite unconscious that it was night, that she was tired. She seemed to be floating, or suspended in ether. Her clock struck and struck; it meant nothing to her. The instant she had finished the procession of her recollections, she recommenced it again, with an unabated thrill.

So morning came, opal and soft and warm, with the whole city steeped in spring radiance. Cecilia saw it come, over the pleasant gardens and trees of the neighbourhood. She heard the clock strike seven, and long after Ellen had dressed and crept away, she sneezed, hanging on her window sill.

Twenty minutes later her mother and Aunt Allie crept into her room.

"She's sound," Mollie murmured, regretfully, over her daughter's tumbled black curls. "God love her, I think I'll leave her lay! I was going to walk up to the convent with her, to have a talk with Sister. But she's tired out, my poor little nun! Papa says she was the belle of the ball. All I could tell Sister anyway is that Pete wants she should stay home until August, when Tom gets home."

"I'll have them keep her coffee hot," Allie remarked, drawing a shade.

Cecilia lay motionless. She did not feel deceitful. She only wanted them to go away. And when they did go away she fell genuinely asleep, and awakened in the unearthly quiet of a deserted house some hours later.

Ellen and Mart and Paul were all away at school; Papa downtown, of course, and Mama and Aunt Allie at church or shopping. It was delicious to Cecilia to know herself still alone.

She loitered downstairs, lingered over a breakfast she only crumbled. When the telephone rang her heart began to thump; otherwise she was still in a dream.

When her mother came in, to talk concernedly about a fresh delay in vocation plans, Cecilia was lying on a couch, pretending to read a story she was totally incapable of following. She listened to her mother's recital absently, sweetly. Mollie told her husband later that the child took it remarkably well.

"Sister said that if it was God's will, a few months more or less would make no difference at all, dear, and you'd have the summer with all of us, and go in in the fall," Mollie explained, fearfully.

Cecilia smiled; "over a breaking heart," Aunt Allie suggested later. But actually it was all strangely distant and unreal to the girl: the family, their healthy noisy voices, the things they talked about. The convent was merely a big grey building; "Sister" was one of the excellent nuns there, for whom Cecilia had a vague regard.

"You see, Tom'll be home in the autumn, Cecy. It'd break his heart if you weren't here."

"I know, Mama." Cecy's thoughts were already tugging toward freedom, silence. There was something she wanted to think about, something she must think about.

After that there was no more talk of a religious vocation for her. And within a week or two all of the members of the big family knew that Cecy had a real beau, one of the rich Taylors, and Ellen and Mart looked curiously at her, as she went upon her absorbed and starry-eyed way.

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Straightening her desk and sharpening her pencils, and quite contentedly busy this soft, warm morning, Kate beamed upon Cecy, as the younger girl came in with an armful of books.

"That's Mart's 'Second Jungle Book' that Papa paid for; it was behind the wardrobe, but Papa says never mind the credit, it's all in a good cause!" Cecilia said, in a somewhat lifeless tone, sitting down, and panting, her face flushed, and the dark little curls on her temples wet from the heat.

The two girls exchanged, or rather reviewed, such family news as was available; there was always fresh news, even though Kate had been at the Cunningham house the evening before, and Mollie had telephoned Aunt Maggie before breakfast this morning.

"I'll tell you who's up there, on the balcony looking up something in the encyclopedia," Kate presently stated, indifferently, with a backward jerk of her head. "Didn't you say you met young Dion Taylor at that ball?"

The tempered summer light in the room blinked dizzily in Cecy's eyes, and she felt her mouth salty, and her hands chill. A sick sort of cramp seized her.

"Their office is only three blocks away, you know," Kate resumed. "This one is overdue two days, that's ten cents," she remarked, dispassionately, to a shabby little woman who stood mutely offering her two dark, bulky volumes.

"I'll be looking up a book," Cecy murmured, her heart choking her.

"I'll tell her. It's my landlady's books, and she never said anything to me about it," she heard the little woman say in a faintly complaining tone, as she moved away.

The encyclopedias were upstairs, ranged upon low shelves on a deep, gloomy deck that was quite invisible from the floor below. A tall, well-built young man, with a bent brown head over which a light dangled, had one of them opened upon a crooked knee, and was reading absorbedly, when Cecy came up.

Half an hour later, passing her desk, young Taylor made an agreeable impression upon Kate by saying audibly, and with a

pleasant smile, "Thank you." And a little later still Kate was astonished to have Cecy appear, with a volume.

"Cecy! I thought you'd gone long ago."

"I was reading," Cecy explained, throbbing, thrilling, shaking from head to foot, suffused with ecstasy and bewilderment and all the beauty and glory of life.

"Listen, Cecy, this is Browning. A girl who comes in here from Berkeley is reading 'The Ring and the Book,' and I got into it. It's much easier than it sounds; I like it." And Kate read:

> "Never may I commence my song, my due
> To God who best taught song by gift of thee——"

"Were they—in love?" Cecy asked, arrested.

"It was to his wife!"

"Oh!" Cecy, going upon her way, with this morning's golden crop of fresh memories to enrich and make still more wonderful the old precious store of them, vaguely felt "wife" to be an alien word. She did not even now know herself to be in love. Something had taken possession of her, and, as with an actual possession, there seemed to be no recapturing the old way of feeling. She did not even remember it, much less attempt to recall it.

An overpowering desire for Dion's company, and the sound of his voice, and the look in his eyes, was always with her. Failing that, she wanted to be alone, to think about him, and smile dreamily to herself while she thought.

Her eyes blazed with a strange bright lustre in these days, and her mouth was dry. Her heart beat irregularly, and she could eat nothing. Sometimes at home she sipped soup or coffee, or peeled herself an orange; for the rest she lived upon air. But when, ten days after their meeting, she had tea with Dion at the Palace Hotel, quite without her mother's knowledge, she was starving, and as she laughed and chattered, she consumed enough cinnamon toast and pastry for two meals.

"Listen, what's the idea? You say you didn't eat any breakfast or any lunch. Is your father holding out on you? Talk about two living as cheaply as one," protested Dion, lighting his cigarette, and bowing casually as he did so to some man friend who chanced to cross the court.

Just the finished manner in which he performed such small social details as this was fascinating to Cecilia. Apart from the fact that he was Dion, and so fundamentally and utterly different from everybody else in the whole world, it thrilled her to be constantly reminded that he was one of the Taylors, too. People were always bowing to him, in the streets, in the hotels; everybody knew him.

Dion lived in town, at his club. His family, a father and mother and an unmarried sister, were prominent in the Peninsula set, and lived in San Mateo, except for a few winter months, when the big city house in Jackson Street was opened.

He rode in the Park on summer mornings, and Peter bought his daughter a black horse, and Cecy rode, too. Mollie was not quite sure that this was correct, but she was almost as dazzled as Cecilia was by the strange element that Dion had brought into their lives, and as Cecilia quietly and definitely took the initiative in this, as in other problems, Mollie made no protest.

Mrs. George Taylor, accompanied by her débutante daughter, Miss Marion, according to the society columns of the newspapers, left for Europe late in June, and the son of the family was consequently more free than ever to humour his own desires. The Cunninghams went as usual to an unfashionable but highly comfortable and beautiful spot in the Lake Tahoe neighbourhood, and Dion came up twice during the season, staying at the big hotel four miles away, and coming over to their luxurious camp in his car.

"Wouldn't it be a strange thing if he should really want to marry her, Papa?" Mollie said, cautiously, more than once.

"I don't know why he wouldn't!" Peter would answer, stoutly.

"She's such a little thing, Pete. And she'd be terrible rich, and mixin' in with all those stylish people! Could she do it?"

"I don't know why she couldn't!"

Not that Peter liked Dion, really. He had an instinctive distrust for all Dion's airy, superficial, pleasure-seeking crowd. He watched Dion almost truculently from under his thick, rough brows.

"I guess he means it," Peter decided, a little uneasily.

Aunt Allie stayed in the Howard Street house during the windy, cool, dirty city summer, always under promise to "get things straightened out so's she could come up to camp," and never going. She did not really like the pine cabins and the out-of-door meals at the Lake, and she enormously enjoyed the quiet rôle of martyr. "I keep house for my brother, his wife's away having a good time up at Tahoe," Miss Cunningham told her associates. She counted washes, sent loaded hampers up to Mollie, and at least once a week Kate or Maggie, or both, came in to dine with her.

Kate loved the big empty house and Annie Regan's jellied soup and icy raspberries. She loved the idle, aimless murmuring of her aunt and Miss Cunningham, the mournful review of cancers, funerals, miscarriages, and accidents that composed their talk.

"Jawn Kelly's goin' up to camp for his vacation, isn't he?" Maggie said to Allie one night, when Kate was on duty at the Library, and the two older women were alone.

"So Mollie said. But you can't always tell—with her."

"Why don't you give him a tip that Kate likes him? Kate's going up for her vacation, too."

"*Who* does?" Allie asked, at a complete loss.

"Kate. She likes him."

"Likes Jawn Kelly?"

"Well, she kind of does."

"~~For God's sake~~! I never knew *that* before! Well, live and learn," Allie said, astonished.

"Well, she kind of does."

"~~For God's sake!~~ Kate? I never knew *that* before! Did you ever?" Allie mused, falling into a dream, as she fitted this stupendous fact to other facts. "Why don't you speak to Mollie yourself?" she presently asked.

"Well, you know how funny Mollie is. I did, once, and she got kind of uppish, and says that Pete wouldn't want any tricks played on Jawn."

"Tricks!" Allie echoed. "But ain't that like Mollie?" she asked. "She'll do everything for her own, and nothing's too good for them, but let it be poor Robbie's girl——"

"Mollie'll get her come-uppance," Maggie prophesied, solemnly. "I don't think any too much of this young feller, Taylor, myself. Money ain't everything. There was a girl Ma used to tell us about, back in the old country——"

They reviewed this girl's mercenary marriage, and her terrible history, to the point where a child was born, "that the doctor said had gold in its blood," and that "died on her." Then Allie said:

"I don't hold much with these Taylors, and never did. They're a wild, divorcin', gamblin' lot, if you ask me. And why Mollie takes it all so pleasant, as if she was the poor child herself——"

"Mollie's very simple about it, she's as tickled as Cecy is, to think of gettin' in with that crowd," Maggie commented, simply. "She says that it's very much to the boy's credit that he'd look at an innocent little ger'rl like our Cecy, instead of one of them rich, stylish ladies that's for ever runnin' after the men!"

"If Kate gets Kelly, she'll get the better of the two!" was Miss Cunningham's final comment. And the conversation drifted to new fields.

Mollie, duly approached by her sister-in-law on the subject of Kate's vacation, proved oddly unresponsive; not that it made any difference in the end. For it proved that Kate was to have no vacation at all this year, because of a three weeks' absence in the winter when Maggie had tonsillitis and double pneumonia, and Kate quite philosophically contented herself with two long week-end visits to the camp in July. And Jawn Kelly did not get up to the Lake at all; Peter sent him to Los Angeles and Kansas City, and he took vacation in that form.

Unconfessed, even in her own soul, Mollie's real reason for rather diminishing than encouraging Kate's intimacy with her

own group of boys and girls this year was instinctively maternal and protective. Kate and Dion Taylor had not met, as it chanced, nor did Mollie intend they should, too soon. Robbie's Catherine was a notably well-favoured young creature, and, although there was less than a year's difference in age between her and Cecilia, Kate was infinitely the better poised, the surer of the two. She was a great flirt, and if she took it into her head to have her own fun with Cecy's most eligible young man, poor Cecy would be as helpless as a baby.

Mollie had no reason to suppose that Kate would act thus unworthily, but a hundred new fears and doubts and hopes were torturing her, as well as her daughter, and she was determined to take no chances. Dion Taylor might not, of course, be in earnest, but Mollie must act upon the supposition that he cared as deeply as poor Cecy did.

For John Kelly's visit she had really hoped, for John was supposedly an old admirer of Cecilia. To be sure the child had discouraged and ignored him so consistently, during the year or two of religious vocation plans, that there had been small fresh evidence of any surviving devotion in John. Yet he would be a good foil; he would serve to show the all-conquering Dion that the field was not quite won.

Mollie was merry, motherly, careless with Dion. She laughed elaborately at any hint that her little girl was grown up enough to be considering marriage, or considered as a wife, seriously. She told Dion that there were a score of girls in the world he liked a lot better than any little girl within a hundred miles of here, and when Cecy, dewy and radiant, and in one of a constant succession of new summer frocks, went off in awed ecstasy to a dance at one of the hotels with Dion, Mollie would warn him: "Keep an eye on her, now. I won't have the boys makin' love to her yet awhile."

Yet the happy facts hammered all day and all night in Mollie's heart. A Taylor of San Mateo! Miss Marion Taylor's brother, if you please! Little Cecilia Cunningham Mrs. George Dion Taylor! What a catch for the child, being carried off in her husband's low-slung car every week-end for all the famous de-

lights of golf and fashionable dinners and country club lunches, down Burlingame way.

Mollie tried to pray about it, tried to analyse it soberly from the standpoint of the child's immortal soul, tried to say "God's holy will be done." But it was no use. She was as excited as Cecilia. When no letter, and no Dion came, Mollie went about with a heart of lead; she could have cast herself upon the bed beside Cecy, and wept as bitterly.

Trembling with anxiety, she advised her daughter.

"Don't reproach him now, Cecy! He's his own master, dear. He hasn't spoke yet. It isn't as if you were engaged."

"But, Mama, it's just as good as! You know I told you that last week he wrote about my meeting his mother and all."

"Tell me again just what he said, lovey. Show me his note." And Mollie would study the scrawled lines, reading between them, analysing this careless term and that. About once a day Cecilia said to her mother, impulsively:

"Mama, tell me! If it was some other girl entirely, and some other man, and you just were looking on, would you think he was in love with her?" And Mollie always answered earnestly:

"I'd know he was crazy about her!"

But she wished the summer was over, the engagement an actual fact. It was all but certain. But she wanted to be sure.

One September day, just before the Cunninghams came back to town, John Kelly walked into the Library, with a message for Kate.

"It seems your telephone's out of order," he said.

"Yes, since Tuesday. I'll have to report it," Kate answered, all roses. She knew that the lamentable failure of Uncle Harry to pay, with the six dollars and twenty-four cents entrusted to him, the two months' telephone bill, and his misappropriation of the said money for purposes of his own, was at the root of the matter. But she couldn't tell John Kelly that.

"It seems that Mrs. Cunningham is worrying because she hasn't heard anything from Tom for almost three weeks," John explained. "She had Mr. Cunningham cable last Saturday."

Kate looked thoughtful, went through a drawer of papers, and unearthed Tom's most recent postcards. She and John Kelly bent their heads over them, studying dates, and Kate wondered what he would do if she kissed his ear, where the fine crisp wave of black hair went over it.

She was beautiful this morning; there was no other word for it. Her eyes shone liquidly, her smooth cheeks glowed; there was a sort of dewy shine and sparkle about her. She pushed back the rich rings of her gold-tipped hair, to frown at the postcards, and John saw her white breast rise under the open sweep of her thin shirtwaist collar.

"Were you up at Lake Tahoe?"

"No, I'm just back from the East." Kansas City was "East" to these Californians.

"Did you get as far as New York?"

"Not this trip."

"There's a place I'd like to see," Kate said.

"Yes, I would too." The day was warm and sunny in the streets yet they could hear the reedy pipe of the fog whistles down beside the dreaming bay. "You were up at the Lake, Kate?"

How she loved to have him call her Kate! She determined to try "John" as soon as she dared.

"Last week-end. They were all looking fine, except poor Ellen, that gets poison-oak terribly," Kate reported. "She's a great heartscald to my aunt, that one," she added, innocently. "She's so bold. The Sisters are for ever reporting her!"

John was listening a little absently. As a matter of fact he was remembering that Leo Cudahy and an unspecified young lady, and the recently married Billy Prendergasts, had talked about a picnic to Muir Woods next Sunday, and John had been urged to come, and bring a girl. He was wondering if handsome, friendly Kate Walsh would like to go.

But Kate thought: "He's thinking about Cecy and Dion Taylor," and her heart sank.

"Young Taylor didn't get up to Tahoe last week-end," she informed him, generously.

"That's an affair, is it?" John asked, unruffled, with a raised eyebrow.

He didn't care! At least he didn't look as if he did! Kate's heart went up with a spring.

"I'm a little surprised they'd let him get so friendly with any of them," John commented, dispassionately. "He doesn't seem like the kind of fellow that a religious girl would look at."

"Isn't he straight?" Kate asked, flatly.

"I don't know anything about him. Well, yes, except that I heard some men talking about him the other day, and it wasn't exactly—pleasant."

"I don't know why my aunt and uncle are so agreeable about it," Kate confessed. "For it mightn't be at all a happy marriage for Cecy, even if she got him. His people have lots of money, but——"

"Yes, but how did they get it?" John asked. "I don't know anything about this boy himself, but they said some pretty queer things about his father when he ran for Governor and was snowed under ten years ago, and everyone knows what the grandfather did. He was a common robber, and a blackmailer!"

He began to talk a healthy, youthful, American sort of socialism, equal chances for every child in the Union, and money going to the men whose sweat and labour and honesty earned it, and Kate was fascinated. John asked her if she'd like to go to a lecture on socialism some night, and she said she'd love it. And then he asked her if she would like to go to Muir Woods on Sunday, and Kate somehow held on to her senses and quietly said yes, that she would. John told her everyone was supposed to bring something for the lunch; but there was always twice too much, Kate needn't bother. He was going to bring sandwiches, because Mrs. Foley, with whom he boarded, was "strong on them." And Mrs. Prendergast was going to bring stuffed eggs and cold chicken. Kate suggested she bring a cake.

After he went away she sat smiling, motionless, for a long, long while. The automatic handling of a few books in no way disturbed her reverie; she neither saw nor heard what went on

about her. When Miss Schultz came in at exactly three, Kate spoke to her about a possible absence on Sunday.

"Kate, for goodness sake, play hookey if you must," said her superior, nervously. "But don't tell me about it beforehand! If one of the Directors should walk in, at least let me be able to say that I don't know where you are! I declare it gets on my nerves!"

"But nobody comes in for books on Sunday afternoons these bright days," Kate reasoned.

"That don't make any difference—you're supposed to be here. Now do as you please," Miss Schultz begged, pathetically. "But don't tell me you're not going to be here, and don't tell me where you *are* going to be! You were gone two week-ends last month, and nothing happened, and I suppose you can risk one more."

"I love you!" Kate remarked, simply, kissing her.

"You poor girl you, that ought to have had your good two weeks' vacation," Greta Schultz remarked with sudden sympathy. "Why shouldn't you go off for the day if you want to! It isn't as if I couldn't handle ten times the people who ever come in here on Sunday!"

So Kate put on her hat, and went out into streets that seemed all friendly, sweet, and lovable to-day. She went to Hale's, and with the six dollars and twenty-four cents that had been again, painfully, collected for the telephone bill, bought herself a dress of violet swiss with prim white organdie collar and cuffs. She stopped at the bakery, and at the butcher's, and reached home long after five o'clock, in a state of absolute felicity.

In such a mood, to be a working-woman, young and admired and healthy, was enough happiness for Kate. The familiar shabby corners, where chaff and papers were eddying languidly in the end of the warm, windy day, the familiar shabby side yard of the cottage, the smells of the kitchen, and her grandmother's spirited voice, all fitted into the picturesque and satisfying story whose heroine was named Kate.

"What'd you get, Kate?"

"Flounder. It was all he had left. He said Aunt Maggie hadn't been in."

"This is one of the days when you don't get 'round to anything," Maggie herself said, coming into the dingy kitchen, where the twilight was gathering in shadowy corners, filming the one small window.

"There ain't much flavour to flounders," old Mrs. Walsh remarked, thoughtfully. "'Wet cardboard,' that's what your grandfather called 'em."

"I thought I'd make a chowder, Grandma," Kate suggested, gallantly.

"Oh, for the land's sakes, not a hot night like this!" Maggie protested. "Besides, Charley says chowder don't lay good on him. He thinks it's the onions——"

"Kalsominin'," muttered the old lady, bitterly, sitting at the battered table, with her chin cupped in her hand, and eyeing the ceiling resentfully. "They could kalsomine themselves out of shape, and that water them hook and laddher boys sloshed onto me roof would come through again! That little red one, he was the fresh young lad. What would he know of plasther, that one? 'Leave them kalsomine it, oncet,' he says to me, with the bright smile shining on the face of 'um."

Kate peeled, turned on the hissing water, snatched utensils, knelt to open the oven door, rattled a frying pan over the stove and scraped a match. Maggie sat dispiritedly at the table; she had been in the house all day, sewing fuzzy materials together, and she was depressed.

"I don't know where you get your energy, Kate," she said. "Did you pay the 'phome bill?"

"I did not," Kate answered, unashamed. "I bought myself a new dress. I'm going on a picnic, Sunday, with the Billy Prendergasts."

"Fevven's sake," Maggie commented, idly, reaching a torn scrap of crust toward the butter saucer, before chewing the scrap thoughtfully.

"Don't spoil your dinner, Aunt Mag."

"Spoil it, dear? I doubt if I taste any. The smell of that fish is enough!"

"I'll tell you what: let's just have crusts to-night. That's almost my favourite dinner!"

"You mean just hot crusts in hot milk? Your uncles say they won't eat that sort of stuff."

"Well, where are they? If they come home at all I'll probably have to do some ham and eggs for Uncle Charley anyway," Kate mused, philosophically. "Would you and Grandma like an omelette?"

"Seems like it's always Friday, and it's always eggs," was Maggie's only answer to this.

"Well, now I'll tell you what," Kate said, definitely, "Grandma and I will have milk toast and the doughnuts and the peaches and the rest of you can have what you like!"

"Until I get me teeth," Mrs. Walsh was beginning disconsolately, when Kate interrupted brightly and suddenly: "John Kelly came in to the Library to-day. He says Aunt Mollie's nearly crazy because Tom hasn't written her for weeks, and Uncle Pete cabled last Saturday!"

"My God, they've got him!" Tom's grandmother predicted, darkly.

"Pete cabled? Fevven's sakes!" Maggie exclaimed.

"And John Kelly said," Kate rattled on, sitting on the floor before the little oven now, and watching her toast, "John Kelly said that he was surprised that Uncle Pete would encourage a fellow like Dion Taylor for a beau for Cecy. John hasn't been up to the Lake at all, because he's been East——"

"Poor Mollie, I'll bet she's fit to be tied!" Maggie mused.

"Lucky thim that has money for cables, and what good would it do whin it got there?" Mrs. Walsh demanded, obscurely.

"Aunt Maggie, are you going to have some of this?"

"I'm so tired I don't seem to want anything, dear. Don't it seem very close to you to-night, Kate? I thought maybe I'd get out to the Jesuits, they've got a Mission on, but I don't know but what I'm too tired."

"There, Grandma!" Kate said, triumphantly placing before

the old lady a steaming soup plate. "Doesn't that look good? And there are doughnuts in that bag, and peaches in the other. I never saw such big peaches. Two bits a dozen!"

"Kate, did you make any more toast than you wanted?" Maggie demanded, as she always demanded at this point. "That smells so good. Is the kettle boiling?"

"No, but wait a minute!" The girl bestirred herself enthusiastically, and presently Maggie was brooding over strong tea, and dipping toast in it thankfully, and Kate had her own bowl of bread and milk.

"Light the light, Mag, the way I won't put the clothes-pins off the winder sill into me mouth," said the old lady.

"Oh, Grandma, it seems to make it so much hotter when the light is lit!" the girl pleaded, "and it brings bugs in!"

"Old lady Lennon was anointed to-day," Maggie stated, suddenly. "I can't think how I didn't come to tell you! Cassy was in, and she says Milton won't get here until to-morrow night. His wife's expectin', too, poor thing. She says they'll sell the house if the old lady goes. But Myra Dunn was tellin' Cassy—just pour what's in the pot, dear, I like it strong—Myra told Cassy that this is three times they've all come down, and the old lady's fooled them. I declare, Kate, if toast and tea don't taste good to-night. Thank God we don't have many hot nights like this!"

"Aunt Mag," Kate asked, luxuriating in the last of the salty, buttery, cooling milk, "suppose we were all at the Palace, and you could have anything you liked, what would you have?"

"Well, I'd go to the Fairmont, a hot night like this, and there's Paddy's fowl for you!" Maggie answered, interestedly. "They asked Pat what kind of a fowl he'd have, and says he, 'I'd not have a fowl at all, but why wouldn't I have it a little cow itself, while I'd be about it!' I'd have on a black lace dress and a hat with them dull pink roses," Maggie resumed, gratified by her mother's deep laughter, "and I'd eat—well, I don't know that I could do better than your toast and tea, Kate."

"Mollie's husband takes her everywhere for dinner, and

acrost the ocean, and doesn't he treat her like she was made of glass itself?" Kate's grandmother remarked, assertively.

"I'd have cold chicken, tomato salad, iced tea——" Kate was beginning, animatedly.

"Oh, I'd have iced tea!" Maggie interrupted, tearing apart her first spongy doughnut.

"Iced tea and cut-up peaches," Kate dreamed on. "I'll go out to church with you, Aunt Maggie," she added, pulling the wet crumpled skin from the luscious fruit. "I'd love it. Let's pile these things——"

"Put the kettle on, girls, and I'll do the whole of them," said the old lady. "The boys must be eatin' downtown."

"Have we butter and eggs, Grandma? I've got to make a cake in the morning; it's my night at the Library to-morrow. Have we any chocolate? Oh, hello——"

Kate's voice fell somewhat flatly on the last word, for both Charley and Harry had come in from the yard door. Harry looked dazed and weary, Charley was as always magnificent.

"Hello, Ma; hello, girls. Now, Ma, don't be frightened, but Harry don't feel very good. He thinks it's something he et. Now, don't be frightened—he's all *right*," Charley pursued. "Sit there, old boy," he said, concernedly, to his brother. "And, Kate, you get him something hot to drink. Is there any soup?"

"There's a bowl of gravy. But it's Friday," objected Kate, entirely out of sympathy, and unalarmed.

"Now, never you mind about Friday! This may be a case of life and death. You heat some up. Or, here, how about some good hot tea?"

"The fire's out," Kate said, ungraciously, removing the last traces of their late meal.

"Maggie, you get a handful of wood out there," Charley directed. "Now, mind you, the boy's all right, but I want to watch him until he looks a good deal better than he does at present writing."

"Lishen, Ma," Harry now said for himself, heavily, keeping his sodden eyes fixed on his mother. "Here's how it was, Ma. Leo Baker—you seen here one Sunday—Leo wanted to st-hay

downtown, an' I says, 'No,' I says, 'my mother was expectin' me——'"

Harry's voice dropped at this point, and he subsided into a sort of slumber.

"Should we get him to bed?" Maggie, who had abandoned any plan of her own for the evening, asked her older brother anxiously. "What did he drink, Charley?" she asked in a whisper.

"Some awful stuff Baker had. He says he only tasted it; he says it was canned oysters," Charley answered. "Come on, old boy, we're going to get you to bed, that's where you belong!" he added, loudly, tugging at his brother's inert figure.

"Should we have the doctor, Charley?" Maggie demanded, half lifting and half carrying such proportion of her brother's weight as Charley could not handle.

"I don't think so. Fix me some bacon and eggs, will you, Kate?" Charley said, importantly, over his shoulder. "They sent for me, and I had to search pret' near all over town for Harry—run him to earth in Carter's."

Well, it was no unusual scene. But Kate never grew accustomed to it, and her fine mouth formed itself into lines of bitter distaste as she set about preparing the meal. Fish made her uncles ill, the family understood. They must have meat.

Charley came out, in five minutes, to eat with a martyred air, and intersperse his large mouthfuls with condescending comment: "Plenty! Plenty! It's fine. I only wanted a bite. I don't care what I eat—don't apologize, Maggie."

"I would have fried you up some potatoes, if I hadn't thought you were eatin' downtown, Charley," Maggie assured him, sitting near him at the table, with her needle-bitten fingers locked, and her eyes enjoying his pleasure in his food.

"You talk fine now, Maggie," suddenly and resentfully burst out her mother, who had been hunched into a chair, following these proceedings with her sharp old beady eyes, "but it's you and Mollie done it, drivin' my boys out of their own home wit' your beaus and your uppishness! Whin did you ever make the place a home for them, or make them stay in o' nights, and not

be stravagin' the streets like wild wolves! Whin it was Pete Cunningham and Frank Cahill callin' you two could make yourselves very grand, and it was 'Won't you step inside?' and 'Ma, where's the cards that we can have a little game of "Five Hundred?" but never a stip you'd stir to keep them away from them cursed saloonkeepers that drugs the little fellers on their way home from school itself, that they'd get a taste for it——"

Kate slipped away from the familiar accusation and the high, complaining voices. She went about the house, and sat on the front steps, and stared blankly ahead of her.

The autumn night was unprecedented in warmth, and the stars seemed very near, throbbing, throbbing, throbbing, as if the whole spread of the pale grey sky were pulsing together. Kate smelled pungent nasturtiums, and her grandmother's famous geraniums, the frilled and fluted "Lady Washin'tons" from which slips had been going all over the city for forty years. Forms went by the old fence, in the half light, girls' voices laughed, men answered huskily. Suddenly a wave of honeysuckle scent came like a tangible thing down the dirty, shabby street.

Kate heard the doctor's telephone tingle next door, and the good old doctor, sitting on the steps with his wife and their orphaned granddaughter, went stiffly inside, and Kate could hear him saying: "T-t-t! I'll come right over. Maybe we can help that a little before she tries to get to sleep."

A few minutes later the sound of his cranked car came from the back of the cottage. Kate heard the little granddaughter protest about going to bed: "It's so *hot*, Grandma!"

"Folks sit out on their steps like this all summer long, in the East!" the old lady called to Kate.

"The idea!" Kate called back, tears trembling in her voice. She hugged her knees, stared straight above her. It was sweet out here in the dark. She thought of John Kelly; he seemed clean, clear-cut, someone infinitely big and gentle and good to rest against. Oh, to get away from the stupidity, and the fighting, and the dishes. But Kate was too tired to hope, or to pray, to-night. She merely dreamed idly. Would a good man ever

marry her? Would she ever get out of this little cottage, where all her remembered years had been spent? Did girls as poor as she was ever have—well, not always enough, but *sometimes* enough, money?

After a while Charley passed her without seeing her, his hat cocked rakishly on the side of his head, his cigarette a pin-point of light in the dark. A neighbour and chum joined him by chance at the gate.

"This whole row of houses will have to come down some time soon, Walsh!"

"I suppose so," Kate heard her uncle say, thoughtfully, as the two men turned toward brightly lighted Fillmore Street. "Man made me a fairly good offer for it the other day! But I don't know that I'll sell!"

Their voices died away. Kate, after a while, got to her feet, feeling dirty and weary and tumbled, and went blinking in again to the closeness, the bright hot lights, and the greasy smells of the kitchen.

Her grandmother was washing dishes with a rag, Maggie wiping. A sulphurous silence prevailed. Now and then the old woman made a quite audible snuffing sound. Maggie was red-eyed, as always after one of these scenes.

Kate began to put away plates. All three women sulked together. Mrs. Walsh tipped up her dinted, iron-grey dishpan, and the grey water flooded the sink and floated strainers and pans.

"Well, you're very agreeable company, the two of ye!" said the old woman, bitterly, stirring the drain with a long iron spoon.

Maggie, unsolicited, brought the kettle from the stove, and poured a stream of fresh hot water into the pan her mother was filling at the cooling tap. Refilling the kettle, it became evident that Maggie had burned her wrist with a stream of hot steam.

She writhed. Her eyes filled. She wrapped the hurt wrist in a dirty damp tea-towel, and lowered her head, bending her neck sideways with pain.

"Oh, Maggie, you burned yourself!" Kate exclaimed, clutching her.

"You're scaltet!" the old woman added, shrilly.

"It's all right—it's nothing!" Maggie faltered. She essayed to struggle on with the dish-wiping, fumbled at plates with a muffled and shapeless hand. Suddenly she raised the forlorn bandage to her eyes, and began to cry, awkwardly and unwillingly.

"It's just—everything!" she sobbed, brokenly subsiding upon a cluttered chair, letting the bandage fall, and resting her head upon her scarlet wrist. "God knows I know I'm a failure, there's nobody in this world would regret it if I was taken tomorrow——" She faltered to silence.

"That ain't you talkin', that's the pain talkin'," old Mrs. Walsh said, sharply, after a pause, as she applied a compress of wet soda about the burn. "Holt that there, dear——"

"Oh, Ma, that feels good," Maggie diverged to say gratefully.

"Well! Then holt your horses about nobody regrettin' you," the old woman said. She and Kate, who had been looking on with scared and sympathetic eyes, now resumed their cleaning with double speed.

"Wait and I'll help you," Maggie said, shortly, after an interval of silence.

"Oh, nonsense!" Kate answered, impatiently.

The smells of yellow soap and ashes and grease and coffee blended into a warm clean smell of scoured wood. Mrs. Walsh, securing an old limp black bag in which what she called "me work" was always kept, began to knit upon purple and black stringy wool. She took her rocker, lifting her small shrivelled feet, in spread and shapeless old shoes, out of Kate's way, when the girl, still sombre-eyed and silent, pushed the worn old broom about.

Kate stooped to gather crumbs, rose red-faced from the floor, opened a stove plate and emptied her dust-pan within. She drew the window shade, closed the closet door, jerked a chair or two into place, making work for herself with a sort of bitter pleasure in its meanness.

When it came to her refilling the sugar bowl for breakfast, her grandmother, apparently oblivious of what was going on, and

knitting fast and furiously, like some old crone weaving destinies, remarked suddenly:

"That Allie Cunningham's a fine one! What does she do but sit at home and 'phome that they'd send up more butter or meat or whatever."

Both Kate and Maggie ignored this, recognizing in it a distinct overture. Exactly what she resented neither perhaps quite knew, but sulking was one of Maggie's natural refuges, and there was something oddly soothing to Kate in the maintenance of an absolute silence. She switched about severely; the kitchen had not been so ordered for some months.

"*She'd* not be one to do her brother a good turn!" Mrs. Walsh pursued, unencouraged. Her favourite device was to select Allie for abuse when she wanted in an indirect fashion to praise Maggie. "There she lives like an ould cockroach in a tavern kitchen—savin' your presence," she added.

"Maggie, is it better?" Kate asked, in a low tone. In moments of stress she sometimes quite simply called her aunt Maggie.

"It's all right," Maggie answered. It was now her turn for an overture, and she said mildly.

"No, it's me. I'm a bad sister to the boys. I know it!"

Kate, tired to the aching point, sat down, pulled open the table drawer, and indifferently began a game of solitaire.

"Aunt Mollie agrees with Grandma," she said, simply, "that we treat the boys terribly."

She put up an ace. Maggie, still nursing her wrist, watched her with a melancholy sort of interest.

"Mollie Walsh does?" asked old Mrs. Walsh, knitting furiously.

"What did you say, Grandma?" Kate asked, raising heavy, beautiful blue eyes dutifully.

"She'd treat 'em better, I suppose?" the old woman demanded, after a silence. "Well, that beats Banager! Mollie——"

Silence. Kate shifted the cards, Maggie sniffled sharply with the tip of a wet nose, breathed more easily, clung to her wrist.

"I wish Mollie's boys in the day of need may have a sister

like Maggie, and that's the whole of that for ye!" Mrs. Walsh presently burst forth, seething. She muttered: "Treat them terribly, is it? Little does Mollie know of the ups and downs of it, as the feller says when dinymite blew him up over the pond, and down he come amongst the ducks—the poor creatures!"

Kate allowed herself a dimple, played steadily on.

"What more cud a saint itself do for them than Maggie does?" demanded her grandmother presently.

"I don't know, Grandma," Kate answered, mildly, and was still.

Mrs. Walsh, who was weaving for herself one of the dreary, woolly tabbed caps she wore all winter long, flung out her yarn with a skinny claw.

"Never mind, Maggie," the old woman said, with a sort of triumphant and trembling prophecy, "your gardeen angel's got it down, it's all wrote against the Day of Judgment, the way you've been an angel to your poor brothers."

"Not much angel about me!" Maggie said, awkwardly, with something between a laugh and a sob.

"I wish I was half as good!" Kate assured her, affectionately, stretching out a hand to lay it over her aunt's.

"Oh, no," Maggie said, briefly, smiling, blinking, gulping.

"It'll all come back to you, ger'rls," Mrs. Walsh assured them, solemnly, with a series of short, convulsed nods. "The day'll come when you'll thank God on your knees you never failed the poor boys or me!"

"I do thank God for it, every day of my life!" Maggie said, passionately. "I wouldn't change with the Queen!"

Kate laid her bright head upon the table, and laughed until the thick lashes about her blue eyes were sopping with tears. But when she suddenly straightened up and continued her game, she would give no explanation of her laughter.

Her grandmother, after one sharp discontented look, went on knitting, Maggie sighed resignedly, and Kate played the black on red, and the red on black. Occasionally she or Maggie spoke admiringly of the order of the kitchen.

Peace, after the storm, was doubly sweet. The kettle sang

clearly, a little thread of sound as wavering and evanescent as was its drifting plume of steam. The clock ticked, and Kate murmured to Maggie as she shuffled the soggy old cards.

"No, Maggie," said old Mrs. Walsh, mildly, "God never sent a better daughter to the wor'rld than you are, dear!"

"Should I take Harry in some strong tea, Ma?" Maggie suggested, consoled, rewarded, for everything.

"Leave him lay, it'll do him no hurt to go hungry the onst!" the old woman answered, hardily.

Silence, except for the kettle and the clock. The cooling night air pulsed dreamily with content. Kate told herself in her secret heart that if her game came out she would be married this year. Maggie studied the red burn on her hand.

"If Mollie had less to say about Maggie, she might have time to learn Cecilia that she'd make half the woman you are, Kate!" her grandmother said, suddenly.

"Well, that's what I say," Maggie added, loyally. "I declare for goodness and unselfishness I never seen the like of our Kate in a young creature before! Vocation or no vocation, or marryin' a rich man, she that's always had everything, you wouldn't get it out of Cecy Cunningham!"

So Kate was rewarded, too.

CHAPTER VII

THE next morning Kate rose in sweet foggy coolness, and baked her cake, and stood it upside down on its own pan, to wait all day for frosting that night. Maggie, who never could resist her sweet tooth, trimmed off various segments for sampling, during the day, but the generous coating of chocolate disguised all this, and Kate was accustomed to Maggie's little weakness. Maggie never served a pie that had not a slim wedge missing, or put the Thanksgiving turkey itself on the table without laughingly apologizing for at least one luscious sliver gone from the breast. Indeed, the lean, nervous woman made most of her meals in this haphazard fashion.

And in the dreamy beauty of the Sunday morning Kate, with the cake in a neat box, was at the ferry, looking, with several hundred other Sunday picknickers, for her party.

Even at ten o'clock, the muffling, warm fog was still heavy. But the day was to be perfect none the less, and it was only as a concession to Aunt Maggie and Grandma that the girl wore her brown coat, a coat that had been Cecilia's two years before. Cars were lined in long waiting tails across the ferry place, policemen were ranking them, and the trolleys that hummed down Market Street kept up a steady clang, clang, clanging of bells.

Children in straw hats, stolid babies in lacy bonnets, boxes and boxes and boxes of lunch, the place swarmed with them. Sunday newspapers shed green and pink segments upon the asphalt, and little boys snatched at them. Gulls screamed over the long building, and the departing ferry-boats sent mellow warnings across the gently moving waters.

John Kelly was waiting, his car parked well forward in the line. His face brightened as he saw Kate. He looked hand-

some, and groomed, and friendly, as he took her box, and guided her toward the car. Kate took the seat beside him.

"Oh, John, I forgot to tell you! Leo Cudahy came into the Library last night, and Maysie's sick—she had ptomaine, they think. They can't come."

"Oh, too bad. It'll be just us and the Prendergasts then. But no matter!" John said, shifting gears and starting his engine. "I guess they're on board, we've not got any too much time."

Ecstasy. Ecstasy. It was one of her golden hours. They left the boxes in the car, and put their coats over them, and roamed about the big ferry-boat looking for the Prendergasts. The sun came out, and shone upon all the happy holiday-makers, and the clean stretches of deck, and the wings of gulls, and the softly rippling blue bay.

Other girls had other men, and were flirting and talking, and bustling about quite happily with them. And Kate had John, John Kelly at last, all to herself, and her heart was full.

No Prendergasts appeared. "Maybe they took the earlier boat, and they're in Sausalito," John suggested.

"Maybe their car broke down." Kate's spirits experienced a breakdown of their own as she mentioned it. Was anything going to spoil their happy, happy day?

"Oh, well, they'll find us," John said, contentedly, abandoning the hunt. But Kate was worried.

Muir Woods was a twelve-mile drive from the ferry on the other side, only twelve miles, but it consumed a long hour, for the roads were mountainous and narrow. Then she and John would be in the heart of the big woods; there was a forest inn there, but they would carry their lunch down to the stream. Two hours more, all alone, she and John Kelly, unchaperoned; and then the long trip home alone, she and John Kelly still unchaperoned.

No use asking herself what her grandmother and aunts would think. She knew only too well what they would think. Kate's heart beat fast. But need they know it if she and John had their picnic, and returned home at the expected time?

Yes, and suppose there was a flat tire, or John was arrested

for speeding by one of the hawk-eyed Sunday speed cops? What a horribly compromising position for her to find herself in!

"Well, Kate, it looks like you and me," John observed, as they took their places again in the car. "I don't know why Billy didn't let me know, but maybe her mother came down last night. They were sort of half expecting the old lady."

He was utterly unconscious of conventional complications, as they moved along in the stream of cars, and floated free in the emptiness of the country road. Kate was praying. Here was her chance, the long sweet autumn day of confidences and opportunities, the chance for which she had been hoping for months—for a long year. And must she spoil it by returning tamely to the dusty Sunday city, and the winds, and perhaps even the Library?

It was too much to ask of flesh and blood. She remained silent at his side, and they moved along through a perfumed world of gardens and woods, shining flat marshes, and the purple rises of the solemn mountains. It was just noon when the car swept under the tall plumed shafts of the giant redwoods, and in the green-tempered light that was like that of some old cathedral they reached their journey's end.

In vain the girl tried to fling herself whole-heartedly into the adventure, now that she was committed to it. A sense of guilt, of uneasiness, haunted her. The Sunday papers were always printing horrible stories about girls who did things like this. Grandma would "skin" her, if ever she found it out! And apart from the danger of detection it wasn't really and seriously a nice thing to do. Suppose one were suddenly taken ill—broke a leg?

She went into the big, widely porched log cabin in the forest, to straighten her hat and powder her nose, and found herself furtively eyeing the other women and children who were circling about there. Not a familiar face. And now they'd have lunch, she reflected, and in a few hours be home again, and that would be the end of it!

But when she rejoined John, a woman and a young girl were with him, and Kate knew, with a peculiar little chill in her heart,

that all was lost. Mrs. Tenny and Miss Winifred Tenny were introduced; the two men of their party almost immediately came up, and with more than one significant glance at her husband, it was arranged by Mrs. Tenny that since Miss Walsh's friends had disappointed them, she and Mr. Kelly had better join the Tenny party. John, to Kate's hot-cheeked annoyance, seemed to feel this an excellent arrangement.

The women were extremely gracious to John, but there was no instant in the hours that followed in which they did not make Kate feel that a young girl who would go off alone with a man for a whole day was a peculiarly unconventional young girl. Perhaps her glowing beauty, in the violet swiss, with the crisp, picturesque collar and cuffs, was no argument in her behalf, and perhaps her instant subjugation of Winny's young man, Earl Saunders, further pointed the little barbs that Winny and Winny's mother constantly let fly in her direction. The other man, Winny's father, was a stout placid person, who concealed himself behind an opened newspaper and fell soundly asleep.

Kate could not sit silent, like a naughty child. So when Winny and both the young men, under her mother's direction, were laying soft big mulberry leaves in a pattern on the long, bare picnic table, Kate began to help the older woman with the inviting lunch-box.

"We thought these friends, the Prendergasts, might be on the Sausalito side," she said, as if casually. "They—they were just married in June."

"I don't know them," Mrs. Tenny answered, uninterestedly. "No, don't bother, Miss Walsh," she added, definitely. "I know just where everything is, and I can do it quicker myself!"

Kate, scarlet, subsided. It was at luncheon that young Saunders appeared to have his first fair look at her, and after that she employed herself by showing Winny, who was a noisy, plain, animated little creature, how easily a younger and handsomer woman could captivate a man. Before them all, Earl Saunders asked if he could come and see her some night, and remarked delightedly that Miss Walsh was—well, he thought she was the smartest girl he'd ever met!

"Here, here, right before Winny!" Mrs. Tenny reminded him playfully but sharply.

"Oh, well, you know what I mean!" said young Saunders, unashamed. Later, John took an opportunity in an aside to ask Kate if she "minded" their having joined the Tenny party.

"She sort of suggested it," John explained, unhappily. "She seemed to kind of take it for granted that we would. 'I don't know Miss Walsh,' she said. 'But if, as you say, your chaperon disappointed you, and she is your employer's niece, it seems to me it would be much wiser for you to place her in my care!' Was that all right, Kate?" John ended, anxiously

"Perfectly," Kate said, icily, hating him.

"No, but would you have done it if you'd been there?"

"Of course," she answered, in a dead voice. "Miss Tenny's calling you, John," she added, looking beyond him.

"Anyway, you seem to like that young Saunders," John said, lingering. Kate said "stupid" firmly and slowly, in her own mind, some five or six times, but made no audible reply. "They wouldn't have asked us if they hadn't wanted us. I think we kind of added to their party," he finished, doubtfully.

"I don't want to interfere," Winny Tenny exclaimed, gaily, coming to the stream where Kate was washing the dainty little white enamel cups from the lunch-box, "but Papa wants Mr. Kelly to look at his engine; he thinks it's missing! This way, Mr. Kelly."

Kate, when he was again in her neighbourhood, asked John if they could make an early start for home. "I ought to be at the Library before five," she said, dutifully. John—it was the single bright spot in the whole miserable experience—seemed glad to act on the suggestion.

But now the infatuated Saunders supplied an unexpected complication. He said he really *ought* to get back to town. His father was down at the office that afternoon, and he had promised to come in.

"Fruit shipping, this season," he apologized. And John, with an interested look, shook his head. "We don't touch it at

all, in Cunningham & Co.," he said. "Enough risk without that!"

"Who's the 'Co.'?" Winny demanded, coquettishly. "Are you?"

"Well, part of it," John admitted. And Kate felt a new, sick thrill of pride in this man whose interest no effort of hers seemed to win. "Come with us then, Mr. Saunders," John added, hospitably. "That is, if that's all right for you," he added, to the Tennys.

"Perfectly all right!" Mrs. Tenny agreed, sweetly. "Business is business." And little as she wanted this third person on the home trip, Kate could have laughed from the depth of her sore heart to see the tables turned so neatly upon Winny.

After lunch, shaking off crumbs, brushing up for the little journey, she heard Winny murmuring to her mother.

"Well, *I* would! Men don't know anything about such things. I don't think she's much or she wouldn't have done it. She's no more engaged to him than I am—I got it out of him without his knowing it. He just knows her uncle——"

"Maybe I'll give him a hint. You hate to have a girl like that think she can get away with murder," Mrs. Tenny said, thoughtfully. "I guess he's doing awfully well. You ought to ask him to your party, Winny."

"Oh, I'm going to!" Kate heard Winny answer fervently.

Kate sat on, her face blazing, her heart choking her. Mother and daughter were just on the other side of the big tree against which Kate was leaning. When Kate got to her feet, and walked about the tree, she could well interpret the look that crossed both their faces.

She made her farewells with dignity, and climbed into her seat beside John. Young Saunders took the other seat just behind them; his hot, joyous breath was upon their necks all the way home.

Yet it was a hilarious trip, and Kate thought John seemed happier—buying them magazines and peppermints on the boat, and discussing the fruit business as compared to the grocery business with Earl—than he had been all day. For herself, she

only wanted the utter failure of it over, forgotten, blotted out by days, weeks, months in which she could think less and less about it.

She was in the Library at ten minutes of five, enormously gratifying and relieving the faithful Miss Schultz. Kate said good-bye to Earl and John together; she resumed her silesia apron, her green eye-shade, her pencil and her paper cuffs in a cold mood of anger and hatred, against them, the world, everything. She hoped, stamping and scribbling viciously, that she would never see either of them again.

And then, late at night, looking at her flushed and weary self in her bureau mirror, noting the becoming width of the plain dark blue hat, and the way the pressed tendrils of her hair clung about her temples, and the violet colour that her swiss gown gave her eyes, Kate felt confidence, and even an innocent sort of surprise, return to her soul, soothing and resting it after so much pain.

She was certainly beautiful. What was John Kelly made of, he that was so smart and so kind, so interested, so witty in his quiet way, that he could look at her, and not see it?

CHAPTER VIII

KATE, there's someone here wants to see you. Mama says you're to come over to dinner!"

It was Cecy telephoning, at five o'clock on a dark evening in early November. Her voice sounded excited, happy.

"You're engaged!" guessed Kate, with an older girl's faint instinctive pang at the suspicion.

"Oh, Kate, aren't you terrible! Somebody'll hear you. No, I'm not, or at least, it isn't that——"

"You *would* give yourself away!" Kate jeered.

"Well, I didn't mean—that is—aren't you awful, Kate?" But Cecy was thoroughly relishing her own confusion and its cause. "No, but the thing is, listen, Kate—can you come over to dinner? We've got company that wants to meet you!"

"John Kelly," Kate's heart said. Aloud she added, "Well, I'll look at my list of engagements. We're having a very formal affair here, to begin with. Covers are now laid for five, on the kitchen table, and two pounds of the best frankfurters are already cooking. The dainty flower scheme is in lavender and pink——"

"Kate, Mama says will you come?"

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes. Wait'll I brush my hair!" The first appearance of the violet swiss may have been a complete and utter failure, but its subsequent wearing had made it that delightful possession of the early twenties, the dress in which Kate said she "always had a good time."

She tumbled down the glorious ripples of her chestnut and gold hair, scrambled them up again, jumped into the swiss, drew her beautiful brows into a frown as she pinned the cuffs with trim little "beauty pins", mashed her new hat, a round-

brimmed blue beaver, down over her violet eyes, and caught up her, or rather Cecy's, old coat.

"Have you carfare?" Uncle Charley asked her, punctiliously, from the kitchen table where he was solemnly spearing sausages, and gravely slapping half its bulk in mustard on each bite.

"Loads!" Kate sang, kissing the pink bare parting of her grandmother's head, and wondering with a little deep amusement if the beneficent Charley had as much or any carfare at all, as she made her escape.

The Cunningham house, when she reached it, rang with joy and excitement. Mollie's "company" to-night was none other than Tom! Tom grown thinner, and oddly older, and using a French word every other minute, and with a moustache!

With a wild scream Kate rushed into his arms, and Tom hugged her and kissed her, and she hugged and kissed him back with good measure. And then they all sat about the sitting-room fire, in the dear old fashion of the days before Tom went away—how long was it ago? A year and a half, gracious goodness!—and laughed and talked and clasped hands and kissed each other again like the mad folk they were.

"Well—but I don't know where to begin! And you're all talked out!" Kate exulted. "But tell me—isn't he handsome, and isn't he French? Tom, I'm in love with you!"

"Go as far as you like, *chérie*," said Tom. Peter, lying back in his chair, laughed and wiped his glasses, and Mollie, sitting close to her boy on the sofa, laughed ecstatically, and Ellen and Mart and Cecy and Paul, all squeezed as closely as they could get to Tom, shouted too. And Aunt Allie, trying not to show how idiotically and completely happy she was, asked interestedly, "What's *that* word mean, now?"

"No, but tell me—here's what I was going to ask when I thought how good-looking you'd got, Tom," Kate reverted, after the interval—"tell me when did you get here!"

"At half-past four; his train was two hours late," Mollie said, tears of joy in her fond, proud eyes. "I was stooping over to pick Paul's socks off my rug, and someone came in and grabbed

me from behind. I thought it was Mart! Oh, my God, the yell I let out!"

"She yelled bloody murder." Allie confirmed it proudly.

"But, Tom—with no warning or letter or anything!" Kate marvelled. "And what brought you?"

"Oh, I thought the old man had had his own way long enough in the store," Tom answered, with an impudent smile for his father. "Time there's some new blood in there. Paris is—keen. But—well, I'd had enough. America looks pretty good to me. No place like home!"

"That's what he says," Mollie and Allie, Cecy and Ellen all chorused eagerly together, for Kate's benefit. "He says that he could have kissed the Liberty Statue, coming up the ocean into New York; he said that he sat out on the back platform all the way from Colfax on; he said when he saw pepper trees and eucalyptus he almost died!"

"Tell what the funny nigger said on the train!" Paul demanded.

But Tom didn't repeat that. Too many other things to talk about. Every separate member of the family had to record his or her experiences in welcoming Tom, the surprise, the emotion, the delight.

"Kate, you're handsomer than ever. My Lord, you're glorious!" Tom told her.

"Tom, don't forget for an instant that you and I aren't within the forbidden degrees of kindred!" Kate answered, joyously. And Mollie shot Peter a triumphant look, and caught his significant and satisfied glance in return. All was as it should be: the boy had had his fling and now he would enter the firm, and he and Robbie's beautiful girl would duly make a match of it.

So it was a happy evening for Peter and Mollie. Now that it was too late, now that Tom and Kate were unable ever to be more to each other than affectionate and mutually admiring cousins, for all the years to come, the managing parents were congratulating themselves heartily upon what might once, but for their scheming, have come about naturally and happily for them all.

Tom had to hear about Cecy's beau, in Los Angeles just this week, but to be home for Thanksgiving, when Tom would surely meet him.

"And Kate must meet him, too," Mollie said, expanding in the warmth of this heavenly hour.

"What!" exclaimed Tom, in surprise, "hasn't Kate met him?"

Well, no, Mollie and Cecilia hastened to explain, a little lamely. You see, everyone was up at Tahoe, and then Dion went East to meet his mother and sister, and was gone four weeks, and then—well—well, anyway, Kate should surely meet him now, and Tom, too.

"Maybe we'll have two weddings—a double wedding—next year," Mollie thought, with a throb of pride. But no, it couldn't be a double wedding, because Kate and Tom would surely have a Mass, and poor Cecy was marrying a "Produstant." Vague future complications of "the promises" Dion must make regarding children, and the details of the actual ceremony came into Mollie's mind, and she sighed. Dion had shown a tendency toward actual atheism, Cecy was arguing with him about it, little saint that she was. Mollie was fearful, but she did not realize that she was chiefly fearful that Cecy's religion would cost her her admirer; she honestly thought her apprehensions came under the head of piety, and she was mournfully proud of them.

"Nothing settled, Tom," Peter assured his eldest son. "Young Taylor likes Cecy—that's all we know now. There was weeks here that he never came near her!"

"But, Papa, that was because he had to meet his mother!" Cecy, although she always denied serious intentions on Dion's part, never was content to hear any one else deny them.

"Cecy!" her brother mused; "that was going to be a nun!"

"No, I wasn't," and "No, she wasn't," said Cecy and her mother together, and Mollie went on: "That was just a young girl's idea. Papa never believed she had a vocation, and it turned out Papa was right!"

"Kate, who's in love with you now?" Tom presently asked, in an aside. Kate flushed brightly and laughed as her only reply.

"But who's *he* in love with?" Kate, who read him clearer than any of the others, asked herself shrewdly.

"Do you see anything of John Kelly?" Tom asked her, when the unbelievably happy evening was over, and when, under strict promise just to kiss Aunt Mag and Grandmother, and return, his mother had permitted him to see Kate home.

"Not much."

"He's an awfully nice fellow, you know. I wish ~~to the Lord~~ it was he that was after Cecy," Tom added, "instead of this other! Taylor isn't the kind of son-in-law Mama'd be so crazy about."

"I—heard something about him," Kate said, ashamed of herself because it was not all sorrow that she felt in hearing Cecy's prospects belittled.

"And how about you, Kate? Heart whole?"

"Oh, not in the least!" But she laughed as she said it. She and Tom were on the dark outside seats of the trolley now, and she could lean against his big arm, cousin fashion, as she asked directly: "Who is she, Tommy? Tell Kate!"

She saw his eyes flash in the half dark; his arm tightened about her.

"Who put *you* wise?" he asked, grinning.

"You did—all evening!"

"My God, do you suppose they're all on!" Tom exclaimed.

"Not one of them. All too happy to get you back. Tell me, Tom. Is she nice?"

"She's—but you'll meet her," Tom said, after a pause. "Yes, she's—nice."

"A San Franciscan? Or is she French, Tom?"

"Listen here, you know you're not to gab about this!" Tom diverged to warn her.

"Cross my heart and hope to die!" Kate said, hastily.

"Yes, she's beautiful——" Tom admitted, slowly, then.

"And are you engaged?"

"Oh, my God, no! She doesn't even know I like her!"

Kate was disappointed. The affair seemed vague.

"But you're going to tell her, Tom? You really are in love?"

The boy was silent for a space. Then he said, in a hard, thoughtful voice:

"I suppose so."

"You'll tell *me* her name?" Kate begged.

"Her name's Babette," Tom answered, unhesitatingly. "Babette Newman."

"Newman? The Alameda Newmans?"

"No." There was a slight hesitation, and then Tom added, "That's her married name. Her family's name is Garberg."

"A widow? And she was a Garberg?" Kate repeated it in a puzzled voice, repeated it again sharply. "Tom," she began, quickly, and stopped. "She isn't——" Kate said again, impulsively, and again was silent.

They had left the car now, and were walking the short distance to the house. Tom arrested her, in the dark, with fingers laid on her arm, and Kate, breathing fast, and frightened, turned to face him.

"Promise me you'll keep your mouth shut, Kate? Swear it."

"Oh, Tommy, of course!" Kate whispered.

"Well, I'll tell you then, although there's nothing to tell. I met her in Paris, studying singing, about four months ago. She had a tiny apartment there, and a maid, and her baby. The baby's five."

"Tom, and when did she lose her husband?"

"Last year," Tom said, after an imperceptible pause.

"Oh, poor thing!" Kate exclaimed. "But she's older than Tom, to have a baby at that age," she added in her whirling thoughts.

"How did he die?" she added, at random. Anything to hold Tom in this confidential mood.

"From the first we liked each other," Tom went on, instead of answering, "and I got so that I liked going to her house—just to talk to her. She's not showy, but she's so gentle, and so sympathetic, and she's had such a rotten time!"

His voice broke on the last words, and he strode on again, passed the Walsh gate blindly and went down the street, and Kate went with him.

"Six weeks ago," Tom presently added, "she told me that her mother and father—they live in Ross Valley, and I guess they're rich, or well-to-do anyway,—that they had said she had to come home. They're backing her, and so she packed up, and started slowly home for America, by Rome and Naples. She isn't here yet; she'll get here in about a week, I guess.

"I stuck it out as long as I could; after she left Paris I nearly went mad. Then suddenly it came to me what was the matter with me, and I—quit. That was all. The minute I thought of following her home I couldn't wait, I was in a regular fever to get started; I broke up everything, and came. I had walked past her apartment a hundred times, and past the Park where I met her once with the little girl, and where we had tea, and I never realized it. And then suddenly I knew that I had to come after her, that was the whole of life for me.

"And I guess that's all, Kate," Tom finished, and was still.

Kate, from a laughing, mischievous interest and suspicion in Tom's love affair, had developed strange emotions in the last five minutes. She was not laughing now; she was looking at him seriously, anxiously, with one hand on his arm.

"Tommy, dear, she's divorced?"

He hesitated, spoke very gently.

"Will be. She's going to apply for it."

"On your account, Tom?"

"Oh, no, I don't think so. It may be that I helped her to see that she could never be happy bound to him, I don't know. We've never said a sentimental word to each other, you know. But the man's a skunk. He brought another woman—well, anyway, Babette and her mother simply lit out, six months ago, and the mother established her in Paris. Then the mother came back; she has other kids. Now Babette is coming home, and I'm pretty sure she'll get a divorce. Meanwhile I'm going in with Father, in the business, and in less than a year I'll be——" His voice flattened boyishly. "Maybe," he ended, simply.

"Be able to marry?" the girl supplied.

"Well, I guess that's what I was thinking."

"Tom, are you so much in earnest?" Kate asked, after a

troubled scrutiny of his dark and handsome face. "Have you thought about it? You know it will kill your mother. A divorced woman, and a Jewess——"

"It won't kill her," Tom said, briefly, as Kate paused, genuinely appalled.

"It will break her heart," Kate amended.

"Only at first. When she gets to know Babette, she'll love her. Everyone does. It isn't *always* the fault of a girl of nineteen, Kate," Tom added, bitterly, "that she's married to a rotter. The man was ten years older than she; I imagine her father and mother are the simple, good sort—like my own people, in fact!—*they* were no judges of character! The idea that she has to be tied to a man like that for life—ah, well!" Tom interrupted his own tirade wearily and impatiently, "what's the use of talking about it? Everybody that has any sense at all knows that it's rot."

"But, Tommy——" Kate was beginning quickly. But she interrupted herself, and stopped short. Why worry about it? It was all so hopeless; an affair with an older woman, who was also a Jewess, the divorce itself problematical, and the boy so young, and for the first time in love! A sudden wave of sympathy and affection enveloped Kate, and she laid her hand impulsively on his shoulder. "Tommy, dear, I hope it'll come out all right," she said.

When they went in upon the ecstatic Aunt Maggie and their grandmother, a few moments later, Kate's eyes were so bright and Tom's manner with her so gentle and so attentive that Maggie's suspicions were promptly aroused, and on the following day she and Mollie and Allie Cunningham had a little council of war.

"They left this house at ten minutes past ten!" Mollie reiterated.

"And they never got to our house until eleven!" Maggie supplied, triumphantly.

"Well, God knows I and Peter don't want anything better for the boy!" Mollie remarked more than once piously. And if her sister-in-law shot her an occasional superior and quietly contemptuous glance at this statement, aloud Allie said only that

it would be a funny thing if any boy didn't admire Kate, that was getting to be the handsomest thing the Lord ever made.

Tom indeed had not been at home three days before he discovered that he could be free for any evening walk by merely saying that he thought he "would drop around at the Library and see Kate." And sometimes he did really go there; Mrs. Newman had not yet returned to San Francisco, and although Kate was not always an encouraging listener, she was always a most sympathetic one.

Handsome, vivacious, witty, and full of enthusiasm, he entered his father's business, and Peter's heart swelled with joy to have his splendid son beside him. Tom would sing his mother into happy tears, in the winter evenings, or sit beside her on the couch pulling Ellen's stiff pigtails; discussing their mutual friends and parties with Cecy; affording Martin occasional enlightenment with his lessons, rolling and tumbling Paul in affectionate big-brother fashion.

And at these times Mollie felt that her heart would burst within her with utter felicity. Here they all were, home again, safe and dear and happy, laughing and joking together like the children they really were! All her worries were laid to rest, and as she and Peter grew from an attitude of mere toleration toward Kate as Tom's sweetheart to genuine gratitude and enthusiasm, once more the thought of John Kelly and Cecy possessed them. John had long ago graduated in Mollie's thoughts from the place of the negligible "little Kelly boy"; he was Peter's right hand in the business, and Tom's office boss. To have Cecy recover from her fancy for the glittering charms of Dion Taylor, and Tom marry Kate—Mollie might well smile as she watched them all chattering together, or quarrelling at "Five Hundred" in a fashion that brought the tears of laughter to her eyes.

"I suppose my son and his pretty cousin will make a match of it," Peter went as far as to say to John, just before Christmas.

"Miss Kate?"

"Kate, yes. She's not his full cousin, you know; the old lady married twice—both men named Walsh, as it happened; they may have been distant cousins, I don't know. But my

wife was only the half-sister of Kate's poor father. At any rate, there's nothing to prevent their marrying, if they feel like it. And his mother and I begin to think that it will shape up that way."

"Is that so?" John said, thoughtfully. "She's"— he cleared his throat— "she's a beautiful girl," he added.

"Yes; Kate's a dear good ger'rl—she's an angel indeed to them poor old wrecks she lives with," Peter acknowledged. "Why them Walsh boys, Charley and Harry, don't blue-mould, settin' around the house, and leavin' the women cook for them," he added, shaking his head, "is more than I know! Kate's the pick of the bunch; she's got more to her than any of them."

"Tom's lucky," John commented, still in an odd, thoughtful tone.

"Kate is? Oh, you mean the boy is," Peter said. "Yes, they're both doin' good."

John Kelly, when Tom came into his office a few minutes later, found himself eyeing the boy curiously. Tom was certainly a figure to catch a girl's eye, John thought; tall, black, with colour burning bright and clear on his high cheek-bones, and humour always ready to twitch at the handsome mouth. Tom shaved daily, his jaw was blue-black, his voice was delightful, and his flashing smile contagious and endearing, like a child's artless smile.

So he was going to marry the lovely Kate? His education completed without a moment's cost of care or concern to himself, John mused, his year abroad generously financed, his fortune secure, his place in the firm waiting, and now this beautiful girl.

And somehow, thinking of Kate, of the bright hair curling up against her hat, the movement of her fine mouth, the appeal in her blue eyes just before the flash of laughter extinguished it, and her patience with her wretched relatives, John felt something in his heart like a pain.

"I wish I was the one!" He said the words almost aloud, staring blankly beyond his high office windows across the descending roofs of the city to all the sharply pointed jumbled shipping at

the waterfront. "I wish I was the one to take her out of that mean little cottage, and make a life for her!" John thought.

The thing had sprung full-fledged into being. It possessed him like an appetite. He got up, and stood looking out; far across the satin-blue stretch of the bay, where little ferry-boats were cutting their clean crisscrossed lines, to where Berkeley lay in a dull haze and glitter of sunshine, and his soul was sick within him.

"Why didn't I ever think of it before?" he said, aloud. "I can't cut in on him now—maybe I never could have had her. But it's—it's funny I never thought of it before! I surely would like to be the one to put pleasure into her life!"

CHAPTER IX

MRS. NEWMAN returned to San Francisco three days before Christmas, which fell upon a Friday. On Wednesday she telephoned Tom, and asked him to come to have tea with her that afternoon.

The telephone message dropped quite simply into his office morning. Miss Trent, who was John's stenographer, handed him the receiver, and Tom heard Babette's voice.

"Tom Cunningham? This is Babette Newman. You remember I promised to let you know when I got back. Well, here I am——"

Tom swallowed with effort and his voice was low and rough.

"W-w-where are you? I want so much to see you."

"I'm out in my own apartment on Gough Street. Could you come out at five, and have tea?"

"Five o'clock?" His senses were in such mad confusion that the words did not seem at that moment to fit into anything; she might have said fifty o'clock for all it conveyed to Tom.

"Yes." Ah, the husky sweetness and yet the odd definite quickness of the loved voice! "That's this afternoon," she elucidated.

"Yes, of course. Yes, I'll be delighted. At five." Tom hung up the receiver.

He looked about the office, everything was as usual. Miss Trent was typing busily, John's desk was empty, his papers and letters neatly arranged. A young boy was filing at a cabinet; Trueman was waiting with a handful of invoices.

Nobody was paying any attention to him. Yet Tom was trembling, and what occurred for the succeeding six hours was all a blank to him.

The moment came when he was free: twenty minutes before five. He had lunched somewhere, on something, with his mother, who was in a happy bustle of last shopping, and wanted Tom to help her select something for Papa. But where they went, or what they ate, or bought, or saw, or talked about, Tom could not have said upon his oath. He only lived for the late afternoon, for the shaking moment when he could take his overcoat, pick up his hat and his gloves, and slip away.

"Will you tell my father, if he should ask for me, that I have a little Christmas shopping to do, and have gone uptown?" he asked one of the women clerks.

"Your mother telephoned that she was going to call for both of you, with the car," Miss Duffy, who was already deeply in love with him, reminded him, by way of answer.

"Well, will you explain for me?" Tom said, with his direct, grave smile. "My father's not in his office just now."

"Oh, certainly," Miss Duffy said, completely overcome.

Tom went out. He walked to Geary Street, jumped on a car. He was in a fever; his eyes shining, his head one bewildered jumble, his heart thumping and his mouth dry. Here he was going out to see Babette.

He looked off at the dull, grey streets; the Christmas excitement of Polk Street, where women were crowding in and out of the lighted shops, and where cars were parked all along the curbs.

He was going to see Babette. Now, to-day, in a few minutes. Tom took off his gloves, and stuffed them into his overcoat pockets; took them out and put them on again. Now, this afternoon, unless something happened, he would see her.

Suppose a maid came out, and said that Mrs. Newman had not come in yet? Tom's mouth filled with water, and his heart turned sick.

Van Ness Avenue. Franklin Street. "~~Lord~~, how slow these street-cars are, after an automobile!" Tom thought. Gough Street. Tom nodded at the conductor.

Two blocks still to go; he walked them rapidly, in a dream, mounted the brick and stone steps of a handsome apartment

house, found the bell, and pressed it with a finger-tip that was unsteady.

Something clicked; Tom was inside, he was taking himself up to the sixth floor in a self-operating elevator; he had rung the bell of number twenty-two.

A maid appeared; smiled. Would he step in? Just a moment, and Mrs. Newman would be there. Tom stepped in, to a pretty chintzy room where windows opaque in the twilight gave obliquely upon a marine view, and where a pink lamp had been lighted.

His heart was beating violently; pulses hammered in his temples. He stood at the windows, staring out at big lighted houses where shades were being drawn against the winter dusk, and where wreaths and the lifted arms of Christmas trees were already visible.

In a few moments now. In a few seconds. She was here. Nothing would rob him now of his golden hour with her—tea with Babette again.

He heard the voice of the French maid, Germaine, and the voice of little Jean, Babette's daughter, five years old. They were chattering in French: "the child speaks exquisite French," Tom thought, confusedly, his heart thundering. "That's the advantage—when they're little——"

Their voices approached, sounded near in the little entrance hall, vanished. Germaine was perhaps taking the little girl with her into the kitchen, for tea preparations.

And somewhere in these few small, strange rooms, so daintily ordered, so fragrant, so still, Babette was making ready to see him. A French clock in crystal and gold ticked smartly; there were Dresden statuettes and Italian cottons and Chinese bronzes and ivory trifles in the room; argosies from all the world had contributed to the environment of Babette.

Suddenly she was beside him, a slim dark young woman, not tall, with her thick black hair cut short over her ears, and giving an almost Egyptian look to her seriously smiling face.

"Tom Cunningham," said the remembered voice, in a pleased

tone. They sat down. "Just in time to say 'Merry Christmas'," Babette observed, gaily.

She was twenty-seven, two years older than Tom, but she looked like a charming girl in her teens, or perhaps more like a charming boy. Babette was flat-breasted, slim, all her lines were straight and young. Her dark eyes were almond-shaped, with just a trace of an oriental lift at their corners, and there was black down shadowing the beautiful scarlet line of her lips. She spoke slowly, almost drawlingly, and often with a characteristic, quizzical smile in her half-shut eyes.

Tom, taking his tea from her, feeling himself somehow large and awkward in her little toy parlour, was conscious of an odd sense of anti-climax. He had been straining toward this moment for hours, thinking of it for weeks. Now he could not quite think why. Just for tea, in an ordinary little Gough Street flat, with a charming young woman who talked Paris and music and climate?

"You may see this in the paper, and so you may as well know," she said, presently. Tom felt a shock. This was something less than friendship. Because he might see it in the paper he might as well know——! "I have come home for my divorce," said Babette. "My father and mother feel very badly about it, and that makes it hard for me. But I shall file my suit on Tuesday. I've been with my lawyer all afternoon. A nice way to spend Christmas Eve, isn't it?" she ended, with her grave smile.

An awkward impulse possessed Tom. Poor little thing, she would be alone on Christmas Day! Would his mother, would his father raise an awful row—he supposed innocently that they might—if he asked her to Christmas dinner at home?

He could tell them he wasn't in love with her, nothing like that. But it was hard for her, alone——

"You'll have Christmas dinner here?"

"Oh, dear me, no! We'll have a tribal meal, in my father's house, in Ross Valley—about twenty of us," Babette answered, smiling ruefully. And instantly she underwent a sort of readjustment in Tom's estimation. She was no wandering solitary,

to be pitied. She belonged to a group, and a not unimportant group.

"My own people are in town this evening, to have dinner with an aunt—my Aunt Bertha," Babette further explained. "There was a little awkwardness——

"Well, I'll tell you," she interrupted her own thoughtful tone suddenly. "This Aunt Bertha is an elderly widow, a certain Mrs. Napthaly, and she is also my husband's aunt, or second cousin, rather. She brought him up. So Max—that's Mr. Newman, is dining there to-night and, as I haven't yet applied for my divorce, nobody will believe I am in earnest, and I imagine——"

She stirred her cup, looked down into it.

"I imagine," she added, looking up with a little scornful smile, "that the idea was that Max and I were to see each other—forgive and forget. But I never could forgive him, never want to," added Babette, shrugging, and narrowing her eyes again. "Forgiveness," she said, superbly, "doesn't happen to be a weakness of mine!"

The fascination she had had for him during all these weeks of separation, the remembered strange fascination that he could neither define nor analyse, suddenly had hold of him again. He forgot who he was—who she was—everything became vague, the actual outlines of the room about him blurred suddenly in Tom's consciousness, and he trembled.

"I dread the publicity," Babette said, simply. "But I won't have that man have any authority over my baby, ever again, or over me. Talk to me about something else, Tom, forget all this unpleasantness."

She had never called him "Tom" before. Tom, shaken by the name, and the glimpse into her confidence, duly talked. He told her of the big house that was hung with wreaths and filled with packages and excitement and holiday turkeys and pies. Babette took a deep interest in Cecy and Cecy's admirer. One of the San Mateo Taylors? That was the pretty sister, who was to have become a nun?

Deeper and deeper into intimacy went the conversation; there

were pauses, but pauses filled with a sort of dramatic consciousness. Babette said she knew just how Cecy felt. Tom had never been in love?

"Not that I ever was," she said, regretfully. "My parents made my marriage. Max Newman is twelve years older than I. The last man that I would ever have chosen for a husband.

"I had six years of misery, six whole years, Tom," she went on, presently, "and then things got—terrible. I went home to my father and mother; they sent me back to him. I was so young—how could I hold him? There were other women—everything! One day, I had a check from my father for my birthday—a thousand dollars. I simply packed a trunk, took the baby, begged my mother to go with me, and left for Paris. Imagine the courage! When I got there I had less than two hundred dollars. But my father's cable and check were waiting for me, and after that both he and Max sent me money regularly."

"It must have been hard for you to take Mr. Newman's money," Tom suggested, as she fell silent, her eyes on space.

"It wasn't!" she answered, a little surprised, even a trifle sharply. "I had given him six of the best years of my life; he certainly owed me something! He's a prosperous man, and he would be a rich one if he'd live a little differently. I'm asking three hundred a month alimony and the custody of the child—and not much to show for the sacrifice of my entire youth!"

Tom felt chilled again, vaguely. The women of his world did not ever take this tone. Yet she was right, she was speaking logically and justifiably.

"You've had a rotten time," he said.

"Awful," she agreed, quietly, gratefully.

"And afterward?" asked Tom.

"Afterward, Paris. The refuge of the lonely!" she answered, smilingly. And suddenly she got to her feet, dropping the little tea-napkin beside her cup. "Come on—one song!" she commanded.

Her touch on the piano was exquisite, her voice clear and true. She sang unaffectedly, and Tom experienced the remembered de-

light of afternoons in grey, rainy, wonderful Paris, as he sang.

Afterward he had to go; the little girl came in, and Babette reminded her of Mr. Cunningham, who had bought her brioches and babas at Rumpelmeyer's?

Jean Newman was dark, fairylike, with straight black hair falling in a silky mane upon her broad lace collar. Her short velvet frock showed her bare little thin legs far above the knee. She climbed quite composedly to Tom's lap.

"We are to be here most of the time," Babette told him. "It is easier for my father and mother to have me here than at home where my sisters and brother are—during the unpleasantness. And I prefer it, too!"

"Could you dine with me now and then?" Tom asked. And immediately he thought of himself making excuses to his mother, and selecting some inconspicuous restaurant.

"Not while these legal proceedings are going on," she reminded him, and Tom, departing, was conscious of something like relief.

Yet the thought of her was strangely warm in his heart. Already he was planning to see her again. This was Thursday; if she went to Ross Valley to-night, returning on Monday, applied for her divorce on Tuesday, might he perhaps see her on Wednesday?

All other relationships and engagements faded into unimportance, Babette was the one reality in his life. His mother, Kate, the family, the business were shadows: shadows thrillingly intensified, it was true, by the fact of Babette, but nothing in themselves.

In the quiet talk and the cup of tea to-day there had been nothing sensational. Just her voice, the clink of spoons, the glow of lamps against windows soft in winter dusk. But remembering it, Tom felt almost suffocated with felicity. Babette's little drawing room was to him like a hidden pool in a deep forest, a little unknown corner of the great world where he could disappear, for draughts of exquisite friendship, music, inspiration.

She was interested in him—nobody else was. She asked him personal questions: "But you don't look as if you'd ever had a sick day. But surely you've studied music more than one little year?" she said. She smiled at him.

Tom, within half a dozen blocks of his home, dropped from the street-car, and walked along in the sharp winter dusk. He must have a few more moments to remember that smile. A flaming sunset had died in the west at five o'clock; now, an hour later, there was still a smouldering glow upon the cold sky, crossed by sullen strips of curled black cloud.

Mission Street was sparkling with Christmas lights; the windows of the market were wreathed with evergreen and lined with frosted steam. Turkeys dangled, stark and white, their great purple heads balled in bloody paper. Oranges sent golden lights into the night. The drug-store windows were bedded deep in candy. Tubs of coloured sweets were ranked at the grocery doors, barrels of scarlet cranberries. Women, for the most part humble and shabby women, were busy with late marketing, shawls bundled about their shoulders, small bundled children dragged at their sides.

Tom, his hands in his overcoat pockets, walked slowly. Yet he reached home much too soon. Its sweetness, its delicious meaning, its marvellous potentiality, had lost none of their fresh appeal to his memory, that smile of Babette.

He deliberately laid away the thought of it, only a hundredth part sensed, remembered, analysed. The instant he was alone he would take it out again, it and a thousand other thrilling recollections, all so peculiarly, so enchantingly his own, to be read and re-read under the very eyes of his family, like a book whose language they did not understand, or studied like gems they did not recognize.

He burst into the Cunningham house, in such a gale of noise and high spirits that Mollie, hearing him from her bedroom, and knowing Kate was downstairs with the others, smiled in deep satisfaction to herself. Mollie loved the festival of Christmas, the happiness, the holiness, and the domesticity of it. To get each and every one of the children what he wanted, and

more than he had dared to ask; to have laughter, thanks, affection ruling the household throughout the long day of presents, feasting, and praying, was to her to be transported to some place better than the everyday world.

There was a pin-prick this year: Cecy was going to the Taylors' for New Year's Eve. But in the happiness of the present moment Mollie was willing to forget that. She and both daughters had been to the big charity tree of the Francesca Sewing Society that afternoon, had seen dolls and books and candy and clothes distributed, and had heard the songs. To-morrow would be the "Holy Family" tree, with more gift-giving and youthful rejoicing. Afterward they would all go down to church together, for a "visit," and then home for tree-trimming and stocking-filling until midnight, with all the alarm clocks set for five o'clock Mass on Friday.

So to-night was cloudless, and when John Kelly came in with a message for Peter after dinner, Mollie sent him upstairs, with a mysterious and important whisper.

"He's laying down, Jawn, he don't feel terrible good. The children are all in the settin' room, and I think Kate and Tom's still in the dining room. And Cecy's in there——" and Mollie nodded toward the little-used parlours.

The big house smelled deliciously of pine, there was a flow of soft golden light from the sitting-room door, a subdued light in the hall, and John could see that the candles were still burning in the dining room. The parlour door was shut. Cecy was in there with her beau, alone, John thought. But Kate was in the dining room.

Very deliberately he walked toward the dining-room door, stopped upon the threshold.

"No, not there, Jawn!" Mrs. Cunningham warned him, happily. "Sure the whole house is full of the young folks to-night!" she added, with a distracted laugh. "It'll be one scald gone when they all marry and take themselves off! Mr. Cunningham's upstairs, Jawn; he's layin' down."

"Ah——?" John apologized, as if corrected. And he went quietly upstairs. But he had seen Kate and Tom, loitering on

at the almost cleared dinner table, in that moment's pause on the threshold.

Tom had been seated with his back to the door, his chair twisted about so that he sat facing Kate, who had the one at the head of the table. His elbow had been propped on the rumpled cloth, and his black head resting in his hand.

Kate, thoughtful and evidently preoccupied, had been resting her head on her hand too, the fine spread fingers pushing up her crown of chestnut-gold hair. She was wearing an old black lace gown, low in the neck and short in the sleeves; her beautiful breast was bare. Her lashes were lowered, throwing a deep shadow on her cheeks, her brows drawn together in a faint frown; she had been speaking in a low tone, and without meeting her companion's eyes.

They were absorbed. They did not notice John when he came, or when he went. But he wished that he had not seen them.

When he came downstairs, half an hour later, after a conference with Peter, who was comfortably sprawled on a couch, with his grey socks and stained vest in full view, Dion Taylor was leaving, and he and Cecy were standing together in the hall.

As John quite unavoidably joined them, and both greeted him, Kate and Tom came out from the dining room, too, and Kate gave John her hand.

"My cousin—Miss Walsh—and this is Mr. Taylor, Kate," Cecy said, confusedly. Kate turned a keen look upon Dion, and for a moment they looked levelly at each other. In the soft light of the fir-scented hall, with the general cheerful stir and murmur of the Christmas holidays brightening the big rooms and infecting the very servants, as they came and went, all the young persons were perhaps conscious of an unwonted sense of happiness and well-being; it was as if each one of them was glad to be himself, for the moment, young, beloved, brimming with health and high spirits. Kate laughed with Dion, and Tom with both; John found himself laughing, too.

Dion had to go; the others went into the sitting room, and

there was much talk of presents and Christmas plans. "I think it was awfully nice of Dion to rush out here for a few minutes; he's on his way to a party," Cecy kept saying, as if to herself.

Mollie, coming downstairs after settling off Paul and Ellen, at nine o'clock, saw the four deep in conversation before the fire. Weary from shopping, praying, bustling about generally as she was, she padded upstairs again, to coax Peter to come take a peep.

"Just as far as the landin', Peter. 'Twill do your heart good."

Peter cautiously followed her halfway down the stairs. He stood there, the evening paper dangling from his hand, a quiet chuckle shaking him.

Through the open sitting-room door they could see them; the lights had been lowered, but there was a glow from the coal fire. It shone upon Cecy, seated beside the big chair, with her arm across Kate's knee. Tom and John were side by side on the big davenport, Tom flung luxuriously back, studying the girls with half-shut eyes, John sitting forward, with his locked hands dropped between his knees. Kate was in Peter's chair, and the beauty of her shining head, her slender relaxed body, her blue eyes set in their smoky shadows, the clean line of her raised chin, and the earnestness with which she was talking, impressed this rather unimaginative uncle and aunt with a feeling of surprise and of something like awe.

"Ah, Peter," Mollie said, softly, as they crept back. "Isn't Christmas sweet? The little ones tucked into their beds, and the big ones down there, with Kate holding them so still. She'll make a lovely daughter to us, one of these days!"

"The boy is very lucky," Peter agreed, smiling more than once, and raising his eyes to look thoughtfully off from his paper more than once, before he could settle down to read again.

Downstairs they rambled cheerfully from one idle topic to another. Tom had been to midnight Mass at Notre Dame in Paris, a year ago. Kate had heard that the street riots were the

reason why there was to be none here this year. But then why have New Year's Midnight Mass, asked Cecy. Yes, that was funny, they all agreed. What did Kate want for Christmas?

This last was John. Kate, upon reflection, said that as she would be twenty-three on her next birthday, she thought it was about time she wanted a husband. Whom would John suggest?

Not himself, he supposed? Well, no, she couldn't exactly accept him bold-faced, like this. He must make her a more spontaneous offer, Kate said.

He would remember that. Tom said suddenly that, in the firelight, she was beautiful. No, honestly, he persisted, as she made herself more beautiful than ever with a slow smile, honestly she was beautiful.

"You mean with all the lights out, except the piano light, and my face in shadow?" Kate asked, lazily, turning, in the big chair, a body whose every curve and line was exquisite. The slim ankle, the rounded bare arm with its beautifully modelled shoulder, the white throat against which the frail old black lace stamped a delicate pattern, the clean chin, the rising swell of the young, firm breasts, and the straight, flat hips as trim as a boy's, under the black, thin gown, were all perfection.

"Kate, why am I not in love with you?" Tom asked, pathetically. And instantly the thought of Babette's room came before him, and his senses experienced a sort of swoon of delight.

"I don't know, Tommy, I thought you were!" Kate answered, aggrievedly. And the upcurving lashes were lifted, and she looked straight at John with her blue, blue eyes, and said, or rather screamed at him, in her soul: "Oh, you fool—you fool! Can't you see *anything?* Why aren't *you?*"

John stared into the fire. Their happy bantering with the great subject hurt him vaguely, but he did not know why.

And Cecy, unusually silent and thoughtful to-night, stared into the fire, too. It was a little thing, a trifle, but Dion had hurt her to-night. Dion incessantly hurt her. Cecy wondered if she was too sensitive, too exacting? She had been hungering for months, hungering her cheerful, normal self into a thin and anxious shadow, for something definite from him.

He liked her—oh, but of course! He made no secret of that. Since their meeting last April—Cecy hated to think that it was eight long-ago months—he had sought her out, complimented her, made her conspicuous with his attention. He had come up to the Lake, he had given her flowers and candy, written her when he was away—but that was all.

And much as that was in her eyes, much as such attentions from a Taylor must be in any girl's eyes, rationally analysed, yet Cecy knew in her sore heart how many of the small yet indispensable indications of a true love affair were lacking.

She had given him her heart wholly, and almost instantly. She could not take it back. When Dion was kind to her, and when they were seeing each other often, then Cecy was happy. She had been happy, ecstatically happy, to-night, when Ida had come in to the dinner table to say "Mr. Taylor to see Miss Cecilia."

Cecy, rising fluttered and radiant from her seat, had had a moment of delight. Dion had had an engagement this evening, a dinner engagement. And he had broken it to come and see her!

Always at his handsomest in his evening clothes, tall, self-possessed, with the admiration she loved to see in his eyes, he had greeted her gaily. And Cecy had said——

She could not bear to think what she had said. Because it immediately developed that he had not broken his dinner engagement at all; he was on his way there. He had just wanted to tell her the final arrangements for Thursday night, New Year's Eve.

So the glow had faded for Cecy, and for a few minutes life had not seemed worth the living.

Gradually that glow was returning. He *had* come to see her, after all, instead of telephoning. And she *was* going down to stay with his mother on New Year's Eve. What girl in her senses would not find this prospect significant, as well as enchanting?

But Cecy's heart grew sick and weary of the incessant process of reasoning and computing that seemed a part of this strange,

burning friendship. She had known him much less than a year, yet she had an incessant gnawing feeling that somehow the bloom had gone from their friendship; she hated to remember the glory and thrill that had belonged to its very beginning.

If he wasn't in love with her, why did he come to see her, and murmur wonderful things to her the instant they were alone?

And if he was, why didn't he say so? Cecy had grown utterly despondent, waiting for him to speak. Sometimes, just as she fancied that the definite moment had come, he would speak casually of an engagement with some other girl: "I'm taking Elinor Harvey to luncheon to-morrow. She's great fun!"

Sometimes, on the other hand, when he spoke of some wonderful party just ahead, and when Cecy would express wistfully her hopes that he would enjoy it, he would bring the blood dancing back to her heart in a flood, and make the day glorious by answering: "Let's not go to things like this when we're married. I hate 'em, really!"

The girl would take out his notes, and compare them. Were the earlier ones really warmer than those that followed, or was it just that the novelty of his devotion had intoxicated her into reading between the lines? They were not many, nor eloquent; Dion was no scholar. Cecy kept them all, seventeen letters, a score of cards that had come with candy and flowers, and two or three telegrams. She knew them by heart; she knew in just which one he had said, "dearest little girl." She hated the receding date of that letter: October tenth. It was December now —almost the new year.

She was dreaming of the new year to-night, wondering if her marriage would take place before another Christmas. And if it did not, thought Cecy in a sort of panic, then what? What would have happened? By what agonizing stages would her whole bright dream have faded, leaving her for ever changed and saddened and unsatisfied?

Well, there was the New Year's party. Anything might happen at the party. She was to be the guest of Mrs. George Taylor for Thursday night, and Dion would drive her home on Friday.

John was thinking that he wished Kate's affair with Tom would accelerate, would finally be over. He would have to smile through the announcement, the engagement, the wedding. He hoped they would make it all quick.

Kate had taken Tom to the piano, and they were murmuring, laughing, singing there. Tom's voice rang out gloriously, he bent his head, his cheek brushed Kate's, and she laughed with her magnificent shadowed eyes only a few inches from his own.

"My true love has my heart,
And I—— and I have his!"

Tom sang. He interrupted himself: "Try the second, Kate; I'll sing softly."

"Tom, I haven't any voice!" But she was obedient, and their tones rose and fell together.

"By just exchange,
The one to the other given!"

"I hope you're going to let me have the pleasure of taking you home, Kate," John presently said.

"Oh, I'm staying with Cecy to-night, thank you, John!"

Her fingers rippled on the keys again; she was set glowing in the corner of the darkened room, in a sort of pool of light.

"Try this, Tom. We've not sung this for years!

"Oh, that we two were Maying!"

Cecy smiled idly, sympathetically, at John. Tom's voice swelled out superbly. Kate whisked a page over, laughed and rippled on.

"That's Kate and Tom," Mollie said, in deep satisfaction upstairs, to Allie. "Has Cecy come up? Did Jawn Kelly go? I'll bet they're alone down there——"

CHAPTER X

THERE was no Midnight Mass, on the last night of the year, after all, so that Mollie was consoled in that particular, as regarded Cecy's absence, and the Crowley girls and Kate came into the Cunninghams' late on the afternoon of New Year's Eve, and saw Cecy's triumphant departure. When the girl herself observed how impressed Regina and Bernadette Crowley were at the mere idea of her being whisked off in the Taylor car, under the escort of the Taylors' son, to the Taylors' actual home in fashionable San Mateo, her spirits and self-confidence rose.

And she had need of them. For by this time Cecilia had worked herself into a state of such agonizing doubt and discouragement that when her mother had brought her in a breakfast tray at ten o'clock, she had declared, almost with tears, that she wished the whole thing was over, and that she were dead.

"You had too good a time at the Cudahys'," Mollie had diagnosed without apprehension, in reference to an innocent little holiday party to which Tom had taken his sister the evening before.

Cecy, sipping her coffee, had said nothing in answer. But she could have laughed aloud. A spider-web of coloured strings to unravel, a supper of lemonade, cocoanut cake and peppermint wafers, and dancing afterward to music from the Victrola! To Cecilia Cunningham such an affair would never be satisfying again.

"Mama, look what's coming on my chin. Isn't that maddening?"

Mollie had inspected a slight eruption.

"That'll never show, lovey. Put a little powder over it."

"Yes, but, Mama, it feels as if it was sticking out a foot! Give me that mirror, will you, Ellen?" And Cecy had stared

at herself in the glass scowlingly. "I'm getting fat," she had said, despondently.

This was the keynote of her mood for the day. She had presently gotten up, opened her suitcase upon her unmade bed, and proceeded to drift aimlessly about the upper floor, rolling silk stockings, looking at herself in every mirror she passed, fretful with Ellen, and darkly gloomy about the prospect of the Taylor visit.

"Aunt Allie, did you see a package for me?"

"You mean the writing paper that come Monday?"

"Oh, *no!* I mean a flat envelope—it just had a pair of gloves in it! It should have come Wednesday—yesterday."

"What possessed you, with your good strong legs, that you'd send home a little envelope with gloves in it?" Aunt Allie, diverted, had demanded in surprise.

"Oh, *please*, Aunt Allie!" Cecy had been ready for tears. An exhaustive, but unsuccessful, search for the gloves had ensued, during which Cecy had strongly hinted her suspicions of Ellen and Mart as grabbers and ruiners of everything that came into the house, and had reduced Ellen to tears.

However, when Aunt Allie had obligingly gone downtown for more gloves, and Cecy had packed her bag charmingly, with the neat brown linen covers Kate had monogrammed in cross-stitch for her Christmas present neatly smoothed over the slippers and frock, the beribboned nightgown and the silver-backed brushes, and when the Crowleys had chanced to come in, to be openly impressed and envious, Cecy felt better.

She had on her "good" hat, as her mother always called it, and the skirt of her new suit; over her pretty lace corset-cover she wore a loose silk kimono. Her cheeks, with the powdering of gold freckles over their healthy, sturdy red, blazed with excitement; she had drawn her curly dark hair becomingly below the hat brim, her Christmas furs, yellow-tipped fox-skins, lay with her gloves and jacket on the bed.

"Oh, you'll have a grand time, there was a lot about it in the paper this morning," Kate said. "There's going to be a hundred people there!"

"Goodness! How would they ever feed them? Like a hotel, I guess," Bernadette Crowley commented. Cecy, buffing her shining nails, could hardly believe in her own good fortune. These other girls, just as good and just as pretty, prettier indeed, than she was, mere lookers-on. And she—she going to the Taylors' New Year's dance!

She put on her best frilly waist, her coat, powdered her nose again, flung the fox-skins about her shoulders, caught up her gloves and her big coat. Ready.

"Here's your beau," Kate announced, from the window that gave her a view of the front door. She wondered why Dion Taylor had come into the Library to waste half an hour in her society, more than once, in the past fortnight. She wondered if Cecy knew it.

"I'll go down," Cecy said, in a flutter. She kissed her mother, Martin caught up her suitcase, and she ran downstairs.

It was a soft, sunless day; fog was lingering in the chilly wide spaces of Golden Gate Park, and as they took the Colma road they were softly, noiselessly enveloped in it. Cecy looked out of the car windows, and said to herself: "I ought to be enjoying this—just the ride. Many a girl would never have as much as this, just this ride, and these furs, and all my nice clothes, and rich friends."

But she was not enjoying herself. Once again she was analysing, doubting, heartsick.

To begin with, at her father's door she had taken the front seat, next to Dion, in the big empty car. And there had been perhaps a full minute of felicity, as they swept through the dreaming winter silence of the Mission. Then Dion had said:

"Here, what am I doing? I've got to stop for Mrs. Williams and Julia!"

Natural enough, that insatiable tribunal in Cecy's soul had decided. His mother was giving a big party, of course there were other guests to transport to and fro.

So they had gone to the Williamses' magnificent mansion in Pacific Avenue. And before Julia and her mother came out to

the car Dion had said, with the assurance that was characteristic of him:

"Let's see, perhaps you'd better get in the back, Cecy. Then I can stack all the luggage in front, next to me."

So Cecy had changed her seat, and had been introduced to a handsome middle-aged woman, exquisitely rouged, marcelled, veiled and furred, and to a beautiful girl quite as conscientiously groomed. Julia was just home from an Eastern school; she was a vivacious little creature, not in the least sentimental or flirtatious, excited over a lumpy puppy hound which she was bringing with her, and full of plans for the summer.

"And in England we'll be with the Kents—that utterly adorable Captain I nearly ran off with, and *would* have run off with if he'd had the railway fare, or I'd had my allowance on time!" Julia chattered. "But my father never sends me my allowance until I'm out on the street begging, with a dog and a stick, and consequently I'm an old maid! Sit up, puppydoodle—was a tootems!" she added, laying her lovely face against the dog's little slobbering nuzzle. "I don't know what your mother will say to my bringing this brute, Dion, but I go to the Hoods' tomorrow, you know, and his mammy's there, and I thought she'd like to see him as a New Year's surprise. I suppose she'll bite him!"

"What'j' name him, Julia?" Dion, who was driving with a sort of sidewise negligence, asked, grinning.

"I told you."

"You did not."

"Why, you big liar! I told you on Christmas Day."

Cecy's sick little heart registered it. He had seen Julia on Christmas Day. Well, she had probably been down in San Mateo, staying at some house where he had called, or perhaps it was at the club.

"You did not." The conversation was continuing.

"I named him Run," announced Julia, "because he came in my Christmas stocking."

Dion shouted, and glanced at Cecy for sympathy. And Cecy smiled quickly, even laughed briefly, but too late. She had

not heard what Julia said, she had been too deeply absorbed in her own wretched thoughts. Dion's look had caught her with a grave, almost frowning face.

"You might just as well not grow fond of him, dear," Mrs. Williams now said, in her clear, incisive tones, "because I certainly should not advise your taking him with you back to Miss Endicott's."

"*You* say, Mabel," Julia returned, laughing. And she stood the puppy on his shaky hind legs, and put his irresponsible little forepaws against her cheeks.

Cecy was not, it appeared, to stay in the Taylor house. Julia was. But Cecy was to be just across the garden in the Haviland house.

The Havilands were abroad. They had loaned their beautiful home to Mrs. Taylor for the occasion, and it had been opened and warmed, beds made, flowers set all about, new magazines and cigarettes strewn here and there to give it an occupied look. And a faded, gentle woman of about forty, addressed familiarly by everyone as "Miss Isabelle," and evidently a sort of confidential secretary or servant or domestic factotum, was playing hostess here.

Well, Cecy reasoned, that was all right. The Williamses would naturally stay in the Taylor household, for Mrs. Williams was Mrs. Taylor's best friend. It was enough—it *ought* to be enough, for little Cecilia Cunningham to be here at all!

It was impressive, perhaps, to have a maid unpack one's belongings, hang one's dress on a hanger, set out brushes and creams in orderly rows, but it was a little oppressive, too. It was wonderful to have a whole big shining enamel bathroom to oneself, violet-scented soap, fluffy washrag monogrammed "L. G. T.", but Cecy was nervous and lonesome.

Miss Isabelle to be sure came in before she had quite finished dressing, and was extremely kind, hooked the new gown, and commented admiringly upon the silky hair.

"You don't mean it? Is that natural? I never saw hair so curly before. Just look——" And Miss Isabelle had put a finger through one of the little temple rings. "Well, you cer-

tainly are lucky," she said. "You better bring your coat downstairs; it's only a few feet across to the Taylor house, but it certainly is cold to-night."

Downstairs were two pretty sisters, the Watsons, and half a dozen young men, and the chaperon of the group, which was already hilariously calling itself the "Haviland Roadhouse Gang." This chaperon was a thin, dark, vivacious woman, twice divorced, evidently regarded with great favour as a fun-maker, interested to the exclusion of almost every other topic in the no-fat diet that she was rigorously observing, and to-night submerged by a heavy cold that her hoarseness, sniffling, and constant recourse to damp, fine handkerchiefs kept uppermost in everyone's mind.

"Cub on, childred,—oh, lissed to be!" said this unfortunate, laugh[illegible]at herself as heartlessly as they did, and marshalling [illegible] the Taylor house. She admitted that she was living [illegible] for the bridge game that would follow the dinner, as laughing loudly in the soft, early winter moonlight, they trooped across the short stretch of bare garden.

Cars were wheeling up in great fans of light, discharging more muffled and laughing figures; greetings flew back and forth as they all bundled into the warmth and light and perfume and confusion indoors.

"Oo—fires! Oh, warm my hands, I'm friz! Mrs. Taylor, M'ma said to be sure to tell you—— Oh, hello, darling! aren't you grand? Oh, aren't they, but the handsomest broke off, I could have shrieked—— Hello—hello, I didn't know you were back! Oh, a fire—let me get to that fire! No, we came with Helen, she's here somewhere——You look simply gorgeous—— Oh, let me see it? It's stunning. Caroline has emeralds and one diamond—— Hello, darling. Oh, hel*lo*, I thought you'd gone to Santa Barbara!"

Cecy smiled, moved about a little vaguely, in the inattentive groups, now and then caught Dion's eye, and always evaded it again promptly, lest he should feel her somewhat strange and unattached state a burden upon him. Presently he put her in charge of a nice older girl named Gilda.

"Sit here next to Gilda, Cecy. Miss Cunningham, Miss Bates. Pipe her off to this crowd, will you, Gilda? She's trying to get her bearings in this crew of roughnecks."

Cecilia tried to talk, to unbend, to get started into a natural and spontaneous conversation. It was the start that was hard, that was all, she told herself. Once launched, and confident, she could be quite as entertaining as the funniest of this group.

They were not really funny, they were just noisy and daring; screaming whatever they thought at the top of their lungs, and trusting that the next speech, instantly following, would carry on the general impression of high spirits and wit.

Little repeated phrases went on between them incessantly, always to be greeted with shouts of appreciative laughter. "You're a trim, tidy little liar," "Open plumbing," and "Where did the child get those hazel eyes?" were [illegible] that Cecy heard over and over.

"I couldn't. M'ma was sick."

"You're a trim, tidy little liar, Margaret. You were lunching downtown that same day."

"I was not."

"You were. And with the 'andsome horficer, of course."

"What, in full view, in the St. Francis? Oh, Margaret!"

"You're all trim, tidy little liars."

"Open plumbing, I call it!"

And then a girl's voice, idle, lazy, drawling:

"Where does the child get those hazel eyes?" And the usual shouts of laughter.

They sat around in large, magnificently furnished rooms eating tiny canapés at a single bite, rumpling delicate little napkins, and changing cocktail glasses, for a long half hour, and loitered out to dinner just before nine. Cecy drew a deep sigh of relief when she found her seat; she had never seen either of the men beside her before, but at least she felt less neglected and forlorn here between them than she had been in the drawing rooms.

Oh, if it were only over—only over! The evening stretched before her full of horrible potentialities for humiliation and em-

barrassment. Who would dance with her? She didn't know anybody. Julia was seated next to Dion. And when Cecy, looking up the long table, saw that, suddenly she felt dull, indifferent, and weary. Her hope, her confidence were like rubber bands that have been sprung until they can spring no longer. She could not tell herself that Julia was an old friend, home from school for only a few weeks, and to be gone again in a few days now.

No, she determined recklessly to have a headache. She would excuse herself early, let them see the year out without her. She would go home to-morrow, cast herself upon her bed, and lie there until she was dead. She hated them all. Let them think what they would of her, she was done with them!

Dion looked down the table at her, winked at her. And Cecy smiled ing htly back, and turned vivaciously to her neighbour. He was a nice boy, almost as much a stranger as she was, as it chanced, and he shyly asked her to dance with him, when, just as the marvellous third course, of shrimps and oysters and chicken and lobster, was placed before them, the orchestra started temptingly in the next room, and almost every one of the thirty diners rose wordlessly and simultaneously.

About eleven o'clock those who had been invited to come to the dance following the dinner began to troop in, and presently everybody went into the ballroom, which had been turned into the semblance of an Italian roadside hotel, with whitewashed arbours strung with grapevines and tiny tables surrounded by green chairs. At everyone's place were a dozen noise-makers, long horns, buzzers, clackers, cymbals, whistles, gongs, and hammers, and long before midnight champagne was bubbling everywhere in the hollow-stemmed glasses, and being spilled on beautiful frocks, and dripping on the floor, and the racket was deafening.

Food was served again, and intermittent dancing began; twinkling atoms of coloured and metal papers flew through the air, and paper ribbons whirled and sank, catching on the picture frames and tousling the women's beautifully arranged heads.

Cecy saw a group of four or five hilarious young men, Dion among them, giving Julia Williams a "toboggan ride" in a small gilt chair. Julia sat with her feet tucked up, her hands in the immense tissue-paper muff that was one of the favours, a tasselled bonbon cap set saucily upon her beautiful head, and her bodyguard pushed her with speed, violence, and recklessness between and around and frequently against the dancers.

In another corner Hungerford Johnson, an enormously wealthy man of about forty-five, kept attempting to sit down in a chair that another man, with a dexterous touch of his foot, each time innocently moved. The hysterical shrieks of several women, watching, obliged them to cling together for support.

There were several tables of bridge going busily, a tense silence during the quick fall of the cards, four faces watching shrewdly. And then babel during the interval for dealing and bidding.

When some of the guests who had to get to Menlo or the city began to go, Cecilia slipped away. Still rosy-cheeked, still smiling gallantly, not quite a wallflower, yet she was more glad to reach the security of her big, softly lighted room, where her nightgown was laid out, and her bed neatly turned down, than she had ever been glad to get anywhere in her life before.

And if it might have been her own room at home, next to her mother's room! But Cecilia would not think of that. She said her prayers without letting her thoughts wander for one second from Dion and his cruel, cheerful, apparently unconscious neglect of her, plunged into bed, put out her light, and buried her head deep in the covers.

But there was no escape from thought.

Ah, how she hated them all! And how she longed to be one of them! The richest, the most popular, the most prominent!

The next day Dion walked down with her alone, to show her his father's horses, and Cecy, in the new white sweater and smart flannel skirt, was idiotically happy. And then, at eleven, there was a little delicate conversation, about further plans, in which Dion's mother, knowing well that it was not true, said blandly:

"And I believe we have to get you back to town this morning?"

And Cecy, not meaning a word of it, answered regretfully:

"Yes, I hate to go. But I promised my mother—New Year's Day——"

"Oh, dear, we rather hoped you might lunch with us here!" Mrs. Taylor dared to say. And Cecilia, who longed to stay, for everyone had been talking about the big New Year's lunch at the Burlingame Country Club, was just about to waver, in spite of her stern resolutions and indeed self-protective instincts to the contrary, when Dion said quickly: "Then I'll drive you in, all by my little self. I have to go in."

So that settled it. An eighteen-mile drive alone with Dion might set everything straight, and start the New Year in a rush of happiness for Cecilia. She flew upstairs to pack her bags.

But when she came down it was to find that Pertree, the fine old chauffeur, was to take her in instead. Dion was furious about it—he really seemed to be so, and he spoke quite sullenly to his mother—but some old friends from New York had just telephoned that they were in San Francisco, and coming down for luncheon, and Dion simply had to be there.

"Then you take me in, and bring them back?" Cecy had demanded, innocently.

Well, no; they were already on their way unfortunately. It was up to Dion to be Johnny-on-the-spot; he'd have to meet 'em—d'you see?—at the station; Pertree didn't know 'em by sight, and they didn't know Pertree; they might miss one another in the crowd—d'you see? There was nothing left for Cecilia to do but thank her kind hostess, leave good-bye messages for her scattered fellow guests, and be put in solitary state into the big car.

Did she realize, with hot cheeks and a heavily aching head, as the motor rolled through the quiet, bare little country towns, watching with unseeing eyes the New Year's Day groups of well-dressed women and bundled babies that were moving about, did she realize that one phase of her friendship with Dion Taylor was gone for ever? That the spontaneous, glowing beauty of

those April, those midsummer days, when he and she were so thrilled to find each other, when they loved to be together, loved the meeting of hands, and of glances, would never come back?

Perhaps she did. At all events, when she went into her mother's house Mollie knew, and with a sick heart, that something was amiss, and from that hour noted a change in Cecy.

The girl kissed her father, touching his rosy, healthy face with her own dry, burning cheek, answered his questions and her mother's languidly, and seemed most concerned, in all the memories of the visit, with compunction that she had offered the chauffeur a tip, and he had declined it.

Only Peter and his wife were at home. The big house was silent, in beautiful order; the lower floor scented with food. In Cecy's room were roses; she snatched the card. "From the little girls of the Saint Ignatius Sewing Society, to their dear teacher."

The girl flung herself on her bed; at her mother's advice, crept into it; Mollie hoped she would sleep. Grandma and the uncles and Aunt Maggie and Jawn were all coming to New Year's dinner. The children had gone with Kate and Tom to the Dimonds' tree; they'd all been to "early," and Aunt Allie to "late" as well. What Mass had Cecy gone to?

For the first time in her life Cecy had forgotten Mass completely. She now lied readily and wearily. "Nine, in San Mateo."

"Nine, is it now?" Mollie asked, surprised. "It's always been eight and ten."

When the family came home at about four, Cecy pretended to sleep. She heard her aunts and Kate whispering as they peeped at her. Then they went away, and she lay thinking, thinking.

She was sick of her thoughts. Her hatred of life and all she found in it included her parents now. Why didn't they *know* the Peninsula set—the fashionable set? It was *their* fault that their daughter was ridiculous, neglected. If they had built on Pacific Avenue or on Jackson Street, instead of out here in the old-fashioned, hopelessly uninteresting Mission, Cecy would

know all that crowd, would have been really included, instead of politely tolerated, at their good times!

Dion would have been as eager to please her then, as he was the odious Williams girl. Perhaps now, now, thought Cecy, writhing as her fancy pictured it, he and Julia were playing golf together, tramping together, murmuring over the teacups in the club together.

At five she sent Ellen downstairs with a message to the effect that her head ached, and she wanted no dinner. Later, please, she would like to see Kate.

Almost immediately her door opened, and Cecy looked toward it languidly; it was Mama, of course, come to coax and pity her.

But it was her father, looking unusually grave.

"I think you'd better get up, Cecy," Peter said, briefly. "Your grandmother and the others will be here any moment. It's not polite for you to lay there, like a queen itself, and leave your mama the brunt of it. Get into your best dress and come down."

"Papa," Cecy pleaded, in ready tears, seizing his big hairy hand as he sat down on the edge of her bed, "please, *please* don't make me! I'm all worn out—I was up nearly all night——"

She doubled over in bed, and laid her wet face against her father's hand, and lay so, too utterly miserable to pretend any longer.

"Cecy," her father asked, presently, "did he ever ask you?"

The girl flung herself back on her pillow, her black hair tumbling off her flushed face, her cheeks quite frankly wet.

"Not—exactly," she answered, after a silence, staring into her father's eyes.

Peter moved his big thumb slowly over the hot drops that lay on his hand, keeping her own locked there the while.

"But he made love to you, dear?"

Cecy's nostrils flared, and she bit her lip. Fresh tears welled in her eyes, and her breast heaved. She nodded, unable to speak for the lump that had risen in her throat.

"Did you let him kiss you, Cecy?"

"At the Lake, yes, he did. But I didn't know he was going to!" Cecy admitted, in a thick tone, and with her lashes lowered.

"And he talked as if he liked you?"

"Oh, Papa——!"

"What do you think now, Cecy?" Peter demanded, after another long pause.

"I don't know," the girl answered, dully, looking into space.

None of the lights had been lighted, and in the spacious room the winter dusk was thickening to early darkness. From far downstairs they could hear the piano, a shout from Martin, Tom's voice. Ellen was having a quarrel with Aunt Allie in the hall; the woman's protest, "Not just before your good dinner! Don't spoil your good dinner——" died away in the direction of the nursery.

Cecy felt that she could lie here for ever, safe in the protecting dark, holding tight to her father's strong hand. She moved it to her young breast and pressed it there. Peter sighed heavily.

"Would you marry him if he ast you that you'd be his wife?" the man asked, slowly.

"Oh, Papa——!" Cecy's tears rained down. "I will marry him or nobody ever in this world!" she said, passionately.

A silence. "But you talked that way about the convent, Cecy," Peter said, somewhat anxiously, then.

"The convent!" There was scorn almost to laughter in her tone.

"Is this so different, dear?"

"Different? But, Papa, Dion is my *life*. He's all I have. I never think of anything else. I never say my prayers without praying that he'll love me! I never go downtown that I don't hope that I'll meet him, or hear the telephone——"

Her voice thickened again, and she was still.

"Well, now, this party," Peter began again, after thought, "that didn't go so well? Was there other ger'rls there that maybe he liked better?"

Cecilia was silent. But her quick glance, surprised and shamed, answered him.

"Was he unkind to you, dear?"

Her voice was heavy with pain.

"Perhaps he didn't *mean* to be. But—they aren't exactly my sort——" she said, hesitatingly.

"That's just it," Peter agreed, quickly, and was still. "If he was one of our own boys I'd know where to have him!" he presently added. "But what do I know of this feller that has more money than ten ought to have, and was raised like any Turk, for all I know, that would have a houseful of women to amuse him! Maybe Mama and I made a mistake—thinking it was for your happiness——" he muttered, half to himself.

And again for a long time they were silent.

"Well, you must live your life, lovey," the father said then, "and face it as best you can. If he's in earnest, he'll come after you—never fear! And if he's not, you must pray that you'd forget him as if he'd never been born. So now get up, and come down, and help your mama."

Cecilia, a ghostly little white figure in the gloom, rose up on her knees, and tightened her arms about her father's big bull-like neck.

"Papa, I love you!" she whispered, into his ear. And as Peter left the room he took his big crumpled handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped his eyes.

CHAPTER XI

IT WAS pathetic to both father and mother, after that, to see how meekly and patiently Cecilia tried to keep her own suffering from the family's eyes. As suddenly as he had come into her life, Dion Taylor for a time at least went out of it. There was simply no more of him; it was all over. He neither telephoned nor wrote to Cecy, nor came to see her, and she had nothing actual, and nothing spiritual or mental, by which to draw him back.

A few letters, a few happy memories, were all. And to balance this pitiful showing, every innocent and happy thing in her life had been torn away. The family group meant nothing now, her religion had become a mere form, books fell from her listless hands, and her mother's vague and timid comfort and philosophy struck against deaf ears. Nothing led to Dion again, to the old flattery, happiness, excitement, dreams, and Cecilia was hungering for these, and for nothing else.

The sudden stopping of an automobile before the house, the coming of the postman, a summons from Annie to the telephone would bring her fluttering colour up, and change the expression in her eyes. But when the inevitable disappointment followed, she would sink still lower into the silence, the agony that Mollie could only watch in an agony of her own, equally acute.

"Maybe it's on'y a lovers' quarrel, dearie," the mother would suggest.

"Mama, there was no quarrel!"

"But then how did it all come to end so quick?" Mollie would demand, bewildered.

"Well, I suppose there was nothing to end." And the utter quiet dreariness of Cecy's voice would silence her mother. There seemed to be nothing to say.

To Kate, as the cold bare January days gave place to the early Western spring, and February came in with buttercups and wild iris, Cecilia sometimes could talk, and Kate, brimming with the brother's secrets, was also put in possession of the sister's.

She and Cecilia would occasionally spend one of Kate's free mornings in the Park, walking slowly among the fragrant piny lanes, where the spring sunshine lay so warmly, watching the fog recede toward the ocean, and with their long silences punctuated by the distant booming of the Pacific on the rocks.

Kate knew that the only reason that Cecilia would consider even this much exercise was that Dion Taylor sometimes rode in the Park. But they never chanced to see him, and Cecy, taking the hateful street-car back through the hateful streets, and playing with her luncheon, would drearily arrange to go downtown shopping with her mother, to go to a movie with her aunt, or to mope about the house entirely alone, with utter indifference.

Tom's confidences were usually made in the late afternoons, or in the evenings, when Kate was on duty in the quiet, shabby library. Kate, busy, capable, practical, made him laugh, his shout ringing like a pistol shot in the silent place. "Ss—sh!" she would warn him, glancing apprehensively at the old men at the newspaper files, anxiously hunting for data, and at the women who mused along the shelves, taking out a book, glancing at a few lines, and thrusting it back again.

If it was evening, Tom usually took her home. Unless Kate were too tired, they walked the short half mile, along crowded Fillmore Street, where movies and candy stores and late groceries were all thronged with cheerful folk. The cousins loitered by windows, bought peanut brittle, found just a few things admirable, and the rest amusing.

They studied the five-and-ten-cent store, with its fluted columns of handkerchiefs and its bright tinware and glittering jewellery; they stopped at the hardware store, and Tom ejaculated at the "peach of a knife" displayed there. They watched the man shaving himself eternally in the druggist's window; the puppies at Robinson's, tumbling about in a wire-grated, saw-

dusty space; and the linen-coated man who made doughnuts in an enormous vat of black boiling fat, turning them deftly with the tap of a wooden rod. The little restaurants odorous of fried potatoes; the photograph galleries with display cases full of dark, Latin-looking girls in First-Communion dresses; the pathetic little embroidery shops that began and failed and began and failed again so steadily; the fruit shops brilliant with ranked colours, were all fascinating to Tom and Kate.

One night they stopped at a small stationery, framing, and picture shop, in whose window tame little domestic pictures were alternated with bits of moulding and a gilded wooden candlestick or two. Through the marked prices, low enough to begin with, conspicuous red ink lines had been drawn; the eighty-nine cent pictures were all sixty-one cents this week, the three-for-a-dime coloured postals were two for a nickel, "this week only." Kate, pitying laughter in her eyes, called Tom's attention to a line of forlorn little paint-boxes, and the hand-lettered sign that said, "Closing Out This Line. While They Last, 15c."

"I love Fillmore Street, and all the people, don't you, Tom?" Kate asked, glancing at him obliquely.

"I love to be here with you. You make anything interesting, Kate," Tom answered. And his smile was a little surprised, as if his own expression had taken him somewhat unaware.

"Look," she said, pointing out a badly coloured print, wherein a young man and woman were pictured bending over a sleeping baby. The title was the single word, "Ours."

"A kid is a remarkable thing, when you come to think of it," Tom said, half to himself, struck by the picture, and thinking, with a sudden humming of the senses, of Babette.

"Isn't it?" Kate answered, also in a whisper. And she felt the blood rush to her face with the thought of what it must mean to a woman to bear a child to the man she loves, of what it would mean to have John Kelly's child in her arms, his dark, gravely smiling face close to her own as they looked down upon it.

"Babette idolizes that kid of hers," Tom said, as they walked

on. "She says she never could have gotten through without Jean."

"Tom, has your mother the least suspicion in the world?"

"About Babette? ~~My God~~, no!"

"Don't you think, sometimes," asked Kate, "that you *should* tell her?"

"What for?" Tom asked, after thought, in a troubled voice.

"Well, Mrs. Newman has got her divorce, you know."

"Interlocutory," Tom amended.

"What's the difference? I thought you told me that the judge had awarded her her decree in fifteen minutes?"

"Yes, but it doesn't work, really, for a year. December twenty-ninth is the date."

"And then do you really intend to get married, Tom?"

"Oh, ~~my God~~! Listen to her!"

"Yes, but you've not asked her."

"Yes, but I will. Jean had pneumonia, you know, and Babette took her over to her mother's house last week. No hurry!"

"You think she likes you?"

"I know she does. I know," Tom added, at his grandmother's disgracefully unkempt garden, now, and holding Kate by fingers on her coat sleeve, "I know she's home loving—children loving. All she wants is somebody to be kind to her, music, kids. I'm making good with my father; he told me yesterday that he had never in his life hoped that a son of his could work in so well. I'll be getting seventy-five a week next year, and I suppose the old man will come down with something toward a house, or Mom will—furniture, maybe. They won't like it at first, but after a few years, when my wife and I go on minding our own business and making good, they'll come 'round. Babette'll be free on December twenty-ninth," Tom repeated. "I hope to be married this year."

"Tom, no priest will marry you! To your father and mother it'll never be a marriage, you know."

"I mind that just about as much as *nothing*," Tom stated. "It's nobody's business but mine and Babette's."

"Yes, but will her family like it? Didn't you tell me that her uncle was Rabbi Garberg? How about that?"

"I don't know," Tom said, with a faintly anxious accent on the last word. "Her husband is a sort of relative, lives with an aunt of hers. They're all strong for a reconciliation."

Kate stood silent, her lips pursed lightly as if for whistling, her grave eyes lowered. Presently she shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, come in and see Grandma, Tom. It's only half-past nine. And, Tom," she added, at the side door, laying her hands on his shoulders as she turned back to face him from the step above, "promise me that you won't purposely deceive Aunt Mollie and Uncle Peter? They think, or at least Cecy says they think, that you and I—you know?"

She had been studying the button her fingers were idly twisting, now she raised her black-fringed eyes, and the moonlight shone in them. The whole shabby neighbourhood of sheds and fences was indeed transfigured to-night by the flooding radiance of the spring moon, garbage and barrels and clothes poles threw a romantic lacework of black shadow across the new grass, and the light from the Walshes' kitchen window lay dim and pink across it.

Tom put his arms about her, drew the splendid, springing youth and firmness of her nearer, and she rested quite contentedly against him, her elbows lightly leaning on his shoulders, her hands locked behind his neck.

"Katy dear," the man said, whimsically and tenderly, "why couldn't it have been us?"

"Tommy dear," she answered, brushing the warm smoothness of his bared cheek with her lips, "I don't know."

"Before I went abroad I used to be crazy about you—in that way, you know," Tom said.

"Before you went abroad I think I would have had you, Tom."

"Gosh," murmured Tom, after a moment when they stayed so, locked together, "what a damn shame! You know you are the most beautiful woman in the world, Katy!"

"Not beautiful enough to get what I want," she mused, with a sad smile.

"Who is he, Katy?" Tom asked.

"Nobody!" she answered, with a brief laugh. But the cheek she pressed for a second against his own was wet.

In another moment they were in the stuffy, warm little kitchen, where Maggie and her mother were still talking over the littered table.

The wreckage of an unscientifically compiled dinner for four was strewn about the room, blackened and gummed saucepans heaped in the sink, with the yellowed egg-beater and a strainer through which some substance resembling potato had been partially forced. On the backs of chairs hung dirty towels; soap melted in a dishpan where suds, glasses, baking pans, and papery onion skins mingled indiscriminately, and some liquid that had been spilled or boiled over upon the stove smoked dully through the salt Maggie had conscientiously heaped upon it.

"You're a fine pair of bums," Kate commented, kissing her grandmother, and then her aunt, before sinking into a seat. "You've been sitting here gossiping since six o'clock!"

"Indeed we've not, then," Aunt Maggie assured her. "Mama and I were late with dinner, and didn't we have a little taste of fish hash and fried onions all but ready, when in walks me young men with their mouths all set for steak. Charley Walsh," his sister added, thoughtfully, "would get up at four o'clock in the morning and you puttin' a steak on the table!"

"There's one, that Charley!—saving your presence—whose stomach will never wish his backbone the top of the mornin', as they'd say at home!" the old woman remarked, with admiring relish. "Your great-uncle Miles, Miles Hagar was his name," she continued, "that merrid a Produstunt that come in later, he was a great eater, too! She had one child they said cud touch fire, and seen the angels that nobody else wud be seein', and him dyin' of a black boil on the day week he'd be four year old——"

Kate and Tom were accustomed to Grandma's rambling reminiscences, indeed they enjoyed them. Kate now reached

for a wedge of bakery ginger-cake, buttered it, and began thoughtfully to eat it, her interested eyes upon her grandmother's face. Tom lighted a cigarette.

"Was that the uncle that had the tame goose, Grandma?"

"That was Eugene." Mrs. Walsh emphasized the first syllable of the name. "Eugene got the far'rm," she continued. "But di'n't Miles hang onto his own little house, that was over in a corner of it, clost up against the potato patch."

Kate, at this point, always visualized a Western ranch, of some scattered thousands of acres, and her sense of justice rose against her great-uncle Eugene, who could be so selfish and cruel with his brother. The few pitiful Irish acres, with their bog, gnarled apple trees, rooting pigs, and smoking peat roofs, were entirely beyond her imagining.

"Wouldn't you think he could let his own brother have it!" she remarked, indignantly.

"Well, if they di'n't have the whole county up in arms about it!" exclaimed her grandmother. "Sure, there wasn't a young wife, with a child tuggin' on her skirts, that wouldn't heave a peat at Eugene, and she passin' his gate. And what'd me bould young lad Miles do, the day the pollis come up from Coolmulligan," she exulted, "but run out and stop the whole of them that they'd not come near the place. 'Sure me little one-een has the smallpox on me,' he says, an' the officer givin' him the laugh. But have it she did, a light attack, little Moira that afterward become a nun, and off wint me brave officers, and niver a wan of thim stipt near Miles again!"

"Until she got well," finished Kate, neatly piling plates.

"An' not then! For di'n't one of Eugene's children get it very bad, the smallpox, that day week," Mrs. Walsh continued her story, triumphantly, "the way he turned black on thim, and di'n't he yell for his cousin, Miles's second child—Clem. 'An' leave me go to him,' Clem says, that wasn't but ten, 'sure no har'rm will come to me whativer!' he says, and down he run to Eugene's, with his mother screechin' like a wild eagle afther him. And di'n't the child get well, and the other cot nothin'

off him," she concluded, obscurely, but in great satisfaction, "and Miles and Eugene the best of frinds from that day on!"

"I see they got their steak," Kate commented in an undertone with a significant glance for Aunt Maggie, as she filled the kettle at the tap.

"Oh, and the time I had getting it, Kate!" Maggie burst out. "I went to Murray's and he was awfully impudent to me; I said I'd let him have something the fifteenth—well, anyway, we'll *pay* him," Maggie said, flushing, "and then that'll be the last he'll ever see of *our* trade! Fifty-one dollars," she added, scornfully, in reference to a long-running bill at the market, "what's that to him? His wife driving a new car three blocks to church, and having it wait for her—doesn't it make you tired! Lizzie Prendergast was in the market—I've got on my best skirt," Maggie diverged to murmur regretfully, "Mama and I were late this afternoon; we were at church." She turned up the garment in question about her hips, and after an unavailing finger search about her person for a pin, picked a wire hairpin from her head, and secured the serge folds with it. "Lizzie Prendergast said, 'Consider the source, Maggie,'" she continued. "Trash, that's what the Murrays are! Well, then Lizzie walked with me to that new market, and I told the feller that we had lived in this neighbourhood for forty years, and had always traded at Murray's, but that we weren't satisfied with the quality of his meat—you would have died to hear me! There was an awfully nice young feller there, he looked like one of the Reilly boys, but that wasn't the name he give me," Maggie continued, scraping a pot with a knife edge, "and he says, 'Well, you'll have to see the boss.' By this time Lizzie and me was laughing, and I says, 'Where is the boss?'

"I thought Lizzie Prendergast," added Maggie, "would have a fit. Well, this big feller come out, and I told him about it—and you'd think, the way he treated me, that we done a hundred dollars' worth of business a month!" Maggie interrupted herself to comment with relish, "and he fixed it all up for me, and he says, 'Shall the boy call every morning for the order, Miss

Walsh?' 'Oh, no,' I says, Lizzie pinchin' me under my cape, 'that won't be necessary.' And home I come with my steak. And I would have liked to ask Lizzie in to see Mama. She feels so terrible about George being taken right after Ellie, that way. She kind of hinted at it, poor thing," Maggie added, regretfully, "but Charley can't stand her, and he was sort of cross to-night that we were so late about dinner—but then he said this morning he mightn't be here!"

"Yes, how were the boys?" asked Kate, who was accustomed to speak of her uncles under the general term. She was washing plates now, in water so hot that Maggie, with the towel, handled them very gingerly.

"Charley seemed fine, only he was kinder cross," Maggie reported. "Harry had a terrible headache. He says it was something he et at Cullens' the other night."

"And something he drank, too!" Kate added, in good-humoured scorn, swashing water. "If he doesn't know what was the matter with him day before yesterday, when I took his coffee in to him, I do! 'Never again, Kate!' he said to me. Did Uncle Charley give you any of the money from Johnson?"

"He didn't get it. Johnson wasn't there. But Harry thinks there's a good chance for a job with the Golden Gate Tonic Filter Company—the booklet's there, Ma and I were just looking at it. It's a sorter tank, with a gold screen into it—it's a new idea," explained Maggie. "You just drink the water out of this tank, and it'll cure diabetes and I don't know what-all. If Harry gets into it, he says there's a small fortune in it!"

"Oh, for heaven's sakes, let's pray he gets it!" Kate exclaimed, fervently, eternally hopeful, and so radiant, tired and tumbled as she was, as she turned to face Maggie, who was now putting away clean china, that Tom interrupted a low-toned conversation with his grandmother to address her. Her blue eyes shone under the pressed rings of bright hair, there was a flush on the fine, high lines of her cheek-bones; he had come to love the tempered humour and kindness of her mouth.

"What's up, Katy?"

"Oh, just a good job for Uncle Harry—maybe!" she said, laughing. Tom made no comment. But unconsciously his months away from home, and Babette's practical good sense, had altered his viewpoint where his own family was concerned. "Fools!" he thought, of Maggie and Kate.

Babette was exacting, logical, loyal with her own. They must do right by her, and she would do right by them. If she wanted a brother's escort at night, financial assistance from him, or his presence, merely as a male, at a dinner party, she demanded it quite simply. If, on the other hand, these younger brothers asked her to chaperon them and their friends, asked advice as to presents, asked intercession with their parents in some domestic row, then Babette stood their friend loyally and gladly.

Such a thing as championing them through such years as Maggie had known with her brothers, Tom mused, would have never entered Babette's head. She would have been the first to despise herself for such indefensible weakness. To her, brothers were simply humans. To poor Maggie they were that mysteriously sacred thing, the family.

Charley and Harry never contributed anything to their mother's and sister's support; when they had money they spent it upon their own amusements and friends, occasionally bringing home a large steak for Maggie to cook, or presenting their old mother, and thereby flattering and touching her to tears, with a five-dollar box of Townsend's sugared fruits.

"~~My God~~, I'd rather have the shoes it would have bought me!" old Mrs. Walsh might comment in a regretful aside to Maggie, later. But before the "boys" nothing was ever said except in affection and praise.

The boys staggered in late from alcoholic orgies, slept, muttering and tumbling, for days at a time. Maggie and their mother would creep into the odorous room, sit in mute sympathy and tender pain beside them, stroking the hot foreheads and straightening the tossed bedding.

Presently trays of hot coffee would be eagerly carried in to them. "Not strong enough!" Maggie would whisper, re-

turning to the kitchen; "he feels something terrible. He says he oughtn't to touch the stuff—all he had was two drinks!"

And then Charley and Harry would arise, bathe leisurely in the kitchen, shave, dress accurately, after the wretched days of disarray, of loose silk handkerchiefs substituted for collars and ties, of shirt-sleeves and carpet slippers and headaches. Then there must be a real meal: asparagus, steak, chops, French bread, and out would go "me bould young lads," as their mother called them, loftily to search employment, or to collect money, or to investigate the schemes that were sure to net "a small fortune."

If their bed were not made comfortably, they told Maggie about it impatiently. If the meals prepared for them by the women were contemptible in their eyes, they sauntered down-town, or Maggie ran out to replace the stew with broiled meat, and the stale bread with fresh.

"You'd eat fish cakes and loaf ends fast enough if you had a wife and half a dozen children to support!" Maggie, flushed over the broiler, would assure her brothers, without venom. And Charley and Harry, clicking knives and forks while they waited at the table, would recite complacently in chorus:

"No wedding bells for me!"

What there was to praise in them the women of the family incessantly praised. The boys were "as pure as angels. No dirty stories or dirty plays or coarse women in their lives!" "Often Kate'll shock them, reading as careless as she does!" Maggie would tell her associates proudly.

And Charley hadn't had his clothes off for three days and nights when Robbie was dying. This was quoted to Charley's credit even to-day, fifteen years later. Charley had such a gentle way in a sick-room that many would prefer him to a nurse. And drink, of itself, was no sin, Maggie sometimes told her niece, when Kate grew restive under the constant responsibility and shame of it.

"There's many a good man drinkin'," Maggie argued, "and many another one that's smart, makin' money, and livin' like a lord, without touchin' liquor, that's a devil underneath!"

Mollie, twenty-six years the proud and protected wife of

a good man, was much less indulgent with her brothers than her mother and sister were. Indeed, Peter, who never was intemperate in anything, was far kindlier in his attitude toward Charley and Harry Walsh than was his spirited wife. But then Peter Cunningham, gentle, good, generous, always ready to put his hand into his pockets to help out the Walsh family, always ready to give Charley or Harry the letter that might mean one more job, was a saint, was "the salt," as his mother-in-law often shrilly declared.

CHAPTER XII

TOM was seeing Babette at least once, and sometimes twice, a week in these days. Kate knew this much, and she conceded in her own surprised heart that Tom had "an awful crush" upon a divorced woman somewhat older than he, and a Jewess. But how deeply he felt Kate never dreamed.

Tom did not particularly think of himself in love. He did not, indeed, analyse the situation at all. He simply knew that in a six-room apartment in Gough Street there lived a dark, quiet, musical woman who was all the world to him.

Sometimes, when he was with her, Tom thought about it, with a sort of mild amusement. There was nothing sensational about her little parlour, with its pleasant chintzes and its lamplight. There was nothing striking about her tea, her thin bread and butter, her cups. She herself was just a quiet young woman with a pretty trick of smiling as she glanced up at him, and a sweet voice that made the songs she sang somehow memorable.

Yet all Tom's world revolved about her. When he was not with her, he was thinking, calmly and consecutively, of the steps that would take him to her. The cars, hammering by, went up to Babette's neighbourhood, and the telephone had become only the medium through which her voice might be brought to him, although as a matter of fact he saw her only at tea times, and at intervals of several days. Tom put her into all the books he read, all the plays or moving pictures he saw, followed other women longingly with his eyes, if by some chance of slender shoulders or prettily set head they reminded him of Babette.

He never went into her little establishment without the old thundering of the heart; or heard the rustle of her frock as she came into the room without something like an actual vertigo of happiness.

She was lonely, and she consulted him about everything. Having Jean's teeth straightened, giving her maid the raise in wages she demanded, even the choice of a spring hat, she referred seriously to him. Tom came to know her very dresses—the plain little velvet one from Paris that was her favourite, the dark blue with the strange watermelon sleeves that had cost so much, the frilly brown one that she hated. The sweater she was knitting for her brother's birthday Tom knew from the first insignificant row of single stitches that Babette ripped, and re-knitted, and counted, and measured on Tom's own chest, to the final triumphant purling. Babette showed him the Italian hand-made handkerchiefs that had cost only—well, it came out about fifteen cents. She brought him a tall boot with so small a foot! The heel had been torn off; there were places where they mended things like that?

Often they sang together, her clever hands on the keys. She had been expensively educated, spoke four or five languages, and drilled Tom patiently and soberly on pronunciations. Many of his old songs she thought trash. But his voice had a certain and strange effect on her, and when he was standing behind her singing he loved to see the little shake of her head that meant that her eyes were filled with tears.

One April afternoon, after a walk in the Park, they went into the little Japanese tea garden, and drank the delicious clear bitter tea, and ate the flat little rice cakes. Jean hung breathless over the canal where goldfish swam under lotos leaves, and Tom and Babette could murmur together in peace.

Suddenly it was said:

"But how do you mean?" she asked, startled.

"Just what I say. You—you *will* marry me, won't you?"

The woman looked at him from under the beautiful dashing line of her small hat. An enormous saffron rose sprawled close to the dark, rich hair.

"But, Tom—what are we talking about?"

He possessed her small hand, as they sat close together at the long, shelf-like table. He bent nearer her.

"I'm talking about marrying you, dear. I didn't mean to

ask you this way. But—but you know that's what I've been thinking of, working for, Babette?"

"But——" she said, slowly, in a troubled voice. She walked away, catching the child's hand, and Tom, trembling, followed her.

They got into the motor in silence, Babette taking the front seat next to him, with Jean in her lap. Tom escorted them to the door of the apartment.

"Babette," he asked, with a dry throat, "may I come up?" Deep in thought, she glanced at him quickly, almost absently.

"Yes. Yes, by all means come up!"

Tom waited for her in the sitting room, his heart beating fast. He felt excited and happy and confused. He did not quite know where his impetuosity was leading him, but there was within him a tremendous confidence that he was equal to his own destiny, whatever it might be.

There was a big black book full of kodak pictures lying on a low table; he had glanced at it before, now he picked it up again and studied it with deep attention.

Pictures of Babette in Europe, as a slim young girl in flaring awkward skirts and preposterously wide hats set upon great puffs of hair. Captions were written in straggling print below the pictures: "Our pension in Nice," "Beggar in the market, Paris."

Some had been written humorously, by the girl of fourteen. But they were not funny now.

Tom found her wedding pictures, was arrested, glowering, by their gaiety and youngness. The bride had been beguiled out of doors by the photographer; she was posed in a flood of summer brightness against trees, rose-bushes, a porch-rail. She was laughing, in a blur of blown veiling, with the sun full in her eyes The groom's teeth showed in a wide, silly grin; he was fat, Tom mused darkly.

Babette was a thousand times prettier now—a million times.

He found more pictures of her, furred and youthfully matronly, in a city street with the nurse and the perambulator beside her. Jean was a lump, in a frilled bonnet and caped coat,

held up by her proud mother. Later, Jean staggered in a sandbox; Jean walked abroad in tiny gaiters, fur coat and muff; Jean looked through the bars of her crib. "Three weeks and two days old"—"Two years and three months old"—"Four years old," stated the captions.

There was a picnic picture; the men in the women's hats, everyone holding up glasses.

"Common! I don't know why I leave that in there," Babette herself said, coming out in her favourite little velvet frock, to sit beside him on the davenport, and lean against him while she also looked at the pictures. "Those are my aunt's children —that's a girl I knew," she murmured, turning pages. Then, eagerly: "Look, here's Paris——"

Mansarded grey houses, a street ending in plumy chestnut trees.

"Ah, Tom, how I love Paris!" the woman breathed.

"I wonder when we shall see the old place again?" His voice was a little thick; he trembled, but with joy. He need not hurry his hour.

"I shall—next year," Babette said, in a clear little composed voice.

"If I let you——" began Tom, laughing, shaking. He closed the book, and put it back on the table.

Babette, sitting on the low davenport, had stretched her slim legs straight before her, bent her shoulders forward, and locked her hands between her knees. She gave him an oblique look, through half-closed eyes, over her shoulder.

"Oh—*ho?*" she drawled, smiling, and with a rising inflection.

"Oh-*ho*," Tom answered, deliberately, significantly.

The woman pursed her full red lips, slightly knitted her brows, and looked steadily before her with half-closed eyes.

"Well, what about it?" Tom asked, laughing nervously.

"About what?" she asked, with another glance.

"About *us*," he persisted.

"Us?" Babette echoed, raising her eyebrows.

"Ah, sweetheart," Tom said, capturing her hand, "don't pretend not to understand."

Babette freed herself, got to her feet and walked to the window. She stood looking out into the muddy grey dusk. A restless, warm spring wind was eddying chaff and papers idly about the street.

Tom stood up and walked over to stand behind her.

"You're such a little thing, Babette," he said, gruffly, whimsically, "I can look right over you!"

She looked up. And Tom felt a little fear, a little chill, strike him. There was entreaty, uneasiness in her look.

"That's the Howard boy, who was so sick, going up the steps, now," she said, indicating the street. "Either the mother or the sister goes to bring him home every night——"

"Babette, were you surprised at what I said in the Park?" Tom murmured, bending to bring his cheek close against hers.

"Yes," she answered, hurriedly and nervously. "But you mustn't!"

"Mustn't what?" he said, fondly, as the quick turn of her head brought her lips almost against his smooth brown cheek.

"You mustn't talk that way, Tom!" she said. And as his frown, his quick colour, and the lift of his chin all indicated a protest, she went on quickly, "Please—and you must go now! I can't have it—— I won't have it!" She had walked away, she turned now, and at the sight of his stricken face, at the odd effect he gave of dishevelment, collapse, consternation, she grew impatient. "Please don't distress me—you don't know how I'm situated—*please* go away——"

"I thought you liked me, as I do you," Tom's deep, strangely stirring voice said slowly and simply. A glisten showed on his forehead.

"I do—I do!" Babette protested. "But *please*——"

"Can't I even tell you?" Tom demanded, with a sort of desperate boyish sternness and dignity.

"Oh, Tom, don't be absurd!" She was almost pushing him away. "*Please*—— We're good friends—I like you very much! There, is that enough?"

"No, it's not enough," the man said, steadily, as she paused.

He took his hat. "Don't you want me to come back, Babette?" he asked.

"Tom, what a tone to take! Of course I do—after a while!" She was avoiding his eyes, moving lightly about the room. She dragged a light chair into place, lighted a lamp, picked a bit of thread from the floor and twisted it in her fingers. "Good-night," she said, brightly, with an upward innocent glance.

"I want you to marry me," Tom said. She shrugged, tossed her head.

"Oh, nonsense!" she said.

"Do you mean that?" he asked, heavily.

"My dear—I never heard anything so foolish. Of course I mean it!"

"Then I'm not coming back," Tom said, his heart dying within him. He waited. Babette put her thread behind the fire, stood up, sighed, and stared into space. "You don't mean it," Tom said, wretchedly. "You let me think——" He paused.

"I let you think nothing! I certainly have no reason for wanting to get married a second time!" Babette answered, briskly. "Now, go along, like a dear boy, and get rid of any such foolish notion."

She stopped short in the middle of a sentence, trying to carry the matter off lightly, smiling, her head on one side, her eyes looking him straight in the face. Tom stared at her steadily.

Then suddenly he turned, and was gone. The door closed. Babette did not move a muscle as she heard the elevator clang, heard the sudden roar of his motor-car's engine in the street below.

Tom drove blindly through a grey world—streets, crossings, cars, tracks, houses.

Once he stopped the car carefully at a curb, and sat staring into space.

"So," he said, quite loudly, "that's that?"

After a while he drove on again, entered the big food-scented, luxurious house, mounted to his own room. His mother came padding up to see him there.

"It's you, is it, darling? Let Mama come in. I heard you slam the front door, and I knew it was you. Papa says you had the machine this afternoon. Did you see Kate?"

"Hello, Mary Honoria. No, I missed Kate—she's on duty anyway to-night," Tom answered, kissing her delicately, with a somewhat lathery face. Something terrible had happened. Something terrible had happened. He had been struck, he felt strangely light and confused. "I beg pardon, Mother?" he said. Babette. Babette. Babette.

"Your 'phome," his mother reminded him simply, indicating the telephone. Tom had had an extension put into his room a few weeks before.

"Did it ring?" The blood pounded in his ears.

It was not Babette. Dick Dimond wanted to know if Tom could go out and see the Hanlon girls with him to-night.

"No, no, no, Tommy! You're going with me and the children to the Orpheum," his mother wailed, as Tom dazedly assented. He broke his engagement with young Dimond before it was made, smiled bewilderedly and reassuringly at his mother.

"I'm sorry, Mom. I'd forgotten."

"Tom, you didn't smash your father's beautiful car into anything?" Mollie, puzzled and uneasy at his manner, demanded.

"Didn't what?" Babette was here in the city, there at the end of that telephone line—Babette. Babette. She was angry at him, she had spoken to him frightfully—his head felt dull.

"You've got one of your headaches," said Mollie. "Kate's been mean to 'um," she decided, in her soul.

"I've got a ~~God-damned~~ headache!" he admitted, briefly.

"Tom, don't you know the Second Commandment that says you're not to take the name of the Lord thy God in vain?"

"Excuse me, Mom." He felt frantic, as if he could burst into tears if she stayed there talking any longer. Who was she, the nice stout kindly woman in the blue silk? What were they talking about?

"Your light lights now, Tom," announced Ellen, from the

doorway, jerking the chain on the light up and down as she spoke. Ellen was a wiry thirteen now; her young ears stood up prominently.

"Leave that alone!" Tom shouted, glad of an outlet.

"Tom, don't speak to your little sister that way," Mollie directed him, lovingly. "Well, you're the most beautiful child that God ever made, then," she added, to Paul, who entered in all the splendour of a velvet suit with a lace collar.

"He would be if he hadn't knocked both his front teeth out," Ellen commented, frankly.

"Ellen took my train and she din leave me even blow the fissles, even!" Paul lamented, burying his head upon his mother's shoulder.

"I wouldn't play with your old train, I'm no baby!" Ellen said, with superiority. "It was Annie that gathered it up."

"Well, maybe you're so tired you'd like to leave us go off without you to-night," Mrs. Cunningham suggested, adroitly, to her youngest born. "Maybe that'd be the best way? I'll tell Aunt Allie——"

She looked for sympathy at Tom as she spoke. But Tom was in no mood to extend it, and at Paul's full-lunged shriek he burst into nervous protest.

"My God! Do you suppose about a thousand kids could get out of here, Mom——!"

"Come, children, we'll go downstairs," Mollie said, a little sadly. She loved to have them all around her when she was dressing, but if Tom loved Kate, and they had had a quarrel, you couldn't expect but what the poor boy would be wild.

"Mamma," Tom heard Ellen ask interestedly, as the voices vanished down the big stairs, "it's a mortal sin to swear, and if Tom swears, and should drop dead, f'rinstance in his bathtub, you know, the way people do, then he'd die in mortal sin, and if he did *that*——"

A door slammed. Tom, listening, heard nothing further. Suddenly, shaking, he snatched up the telephone book, whirled the pages. A moment later, very quietly, without conscious thought or emotion, he had asked for Babette's number.

Silence. Silence. Then Tom's mother, downstairs, took her receiver from the hook. Tom, upstairs, could hear her say:

"Will you give me the St. Francis, please—I disremember the number, it's the newsstand I want, about some theatre tickets that was to be left there in the name of Peter Cun——"

Tom softly restored his receiver to its place. He was trembling as he finished dressing. In five minutes he called Babette's number again. No answer. "Your party does not answer," the operator assured him; "do you want me to continue to try to get the number?"

"Yes, please—— No, never mind," Tom said, his heart lead. Desperately he began to plan to see her, at once, to-night. It was only this prospect that made life bearable. To-night! He had never seen her at night. But to-night he must take himself up to her floor in the little self-operating elevator, ring her bell. The nice French maid would come to the door. "Is Mrs. Newman in? Will you ask if I might see her for a moment?"

It was not so much that he wanted to do it, as that under no conditions could he think of doing anything else. Babette possessed him like a flame; he was only dimly conscious of what went on until he should see her again. To see her, at night, when little Jean was in bed, and the city dark and sleeping——

Seven o'clock. He would get there about eight. What were they doing now? Eating dinner? Certainly, this was dinner.

"Tom, your mother spoke to you."

"I beg your pardon, Mom. I didn't hear you."

"That's all right, darling. How was Kate to-day?"

"Fine, I guess. Yes, fine."

"You said you didn't see her to-day!" Ellen shrilled.

"Well, I did." Had he? He rather thought he had not.

"They must have had an awful fight, what on earth about?" Mollie mused. If Kate was being mean to her boy——!

Babette and he had quarrelled, Tom thought, confusedly. She had said cruel things to him. What were they? Well, nothing mattered except that he must somehow shake Mom

and these insufferable kids, and get to Gough Street—up in the self-operating elevator—ringing the bell——

"Is Mrs. Newman in? I wonder if I could speak to her for a moment?"

Then the wait. The wait with his heart hammering—hammering. Then the rustle of her beloved, fragrant gown——

Oh, God, how could he wait for it? Even an hour—half an hour.

He drove the family down Market Street, stopped at the big hotel. Mr. Cunningham's tickets? Here they were. Tom took one out of the little envelope before rejoining the family.

"Mama, I have my ticket, in case I have trouble finding a decent place to park the car. You go in to the theatre, and I'll join you as soon as I can. The kids don't want to miss the animal number!"

"You're a dear good brother, the way you're always thinking about them, Tom!" Mollie said, with a little grateful rub of her shoulder against his before she got out.

He was alone. He was flying through the dark streets with a heart full to pain of hope and joy. Van Ness. Franklin. Gough.

The car was parked across the street. Tom entered the apartment house dizzily, mounted to Babette's floor. What he was going to say he did not know; it was enough that he was here.

He heard the bell ring. Silence. Then finally the Frenchwoman peering out of darkness.

"Is Mrs. Newman here? Would you ask her——"

"She went to her mother, in the country," the woman said, in French. The whole world turned black. Black.

"Oh, I see. I see. Well, thank you. Thank you. I was wondering if I left a paper to-day——?"

"Would you like to come in and look?" She had lighted the hall. She was gathering some informal garment about her as she scudded back through the dining room's swinging door. Tom made a blind and wretched pretense at hunting.

He went out into the dark a few minutes later dazed and sick. To-morrow sounded to Tom a year away. Mollie, when he stumbled in beside her in the dark theatre, put a plump loving hand on his.

"Did you have to go far, lovey?"

"Far?" He could telephone Ross Valley to-morrow, perhaps cross with her on the boat——

"To park the car, dear?"

"Oh. Oh, yes! Well, no, right here in Mason Street. Not far, right up the street."

"All you missed was two men that came on," Ellen supplied in a sharp whisper, shaken with amusement, "and one, that had a great big fat face, had on a little teenty hat, and the other had a thin face—didn't he, Mom?—and his hat——"

The most exquisite hour in Tom's life came two days later, when Babette came back from the country, and in answer to his telephoned appeal, consented to see him.

They had tea, late in a soft, sunless afternoon when the grey streets stirred and loomed with noiselessly [illegible]ding fog. Tom's big hand shook as he took his cup; even Ba[illegible]ette's quiet, self-possessed manner was replaced by a mood oddly girlish, oddly unformed to-day.

It was agreed. There was to be no more talk of love, not for months—years. And they were to be friends. They were to see each other once a week, and everything was to be as it had been. Their hands, their eyes, their confident smiles, met upon the little compact.

Tom was broken. He felt as if he had weathered a devastating illness. Gratefully, humbly, he took the crumbs that fell from her generous little hand. He left her, went home, dazed and purified with great and holy joy. He would be worthy of her trust. He would not fail her—little Babette!

Shyly, and with a deeply augmented appreciation and delight on both sides, the tea-hours, the confidences, recommenced. Books were exchanged again; once or twice Babette telephoned Tom, when she was shopping downtown, and they lunched

together. They sat long at the table, and if the phrases they exchanged so earnestly were not lovers' words, at least these hours were the most vital, the most burning with interest, in both their lives.

When they sang together, Babette sometimes laid her little soft brown hand upon Tom's shoulder, as she stood behind him. He thought that she did not know she did it, but she was quite conscious of what she did. His cleanness, his Irish freshness and purity and buoyancy had a strange fascination for her. There was nothing calculating or material about him. Babette liked to be near him.

Both Babette and Tom saw other persons continually, their mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters. But the only hours during which they seemed to live were the hours they spent together. When she was with her practical, somewhat selfish family, Babette's lips and eyes often wore a dreamy smile nowadays. Tom, away from her, had a fashion of falling into deeply abstracted moods; his mother noticed it, and despaired. Was the family boring to Tom, after Paris?

"Why d' t you want to take Cecy to the Prendergasts' party, dear Mollie might ask, anxiously.

"All you have to do is say the word, Mom!"

"Yes, I know, dear. But you said it would be stupid."

"Stupid! Gosh, it'll be the extension of the legal limit!"

"You used to like the Prendergasts, Tom."

"Never! A lot of bird-brains that sit around playing Five Hundred, or dancing to the Victrola. I'd rather be shot."

Mollie, instinctively fearful, would sigh deeply. It seemed impossible to satisfy a growing son with home ties. If he'd only marry Kate, a dear, sweet, pure good girl, what a relief it would be!

CHAPTER XIII

IN JULY Mollie and the younger Cunninghams always went up to the log cabins that were part of a loosely constructed hotel system on Lake Tahoe. This year Kate's branch of the Library was being reconstructed, and Kate was offered a six weeks' vacation on half pay. The alternative was substitute service in a dozen library branches all over the city, and it was Mollie who affectionately suggested that the girl take the welcome leisure and accompany the family to "Camp."

"I don't know why you're so good to me, Aunt Mollie," said Kate gratefully, when Mollie, as Kate's check was given as a matter of course to Maggie, for household expenses, replenished the girl's wardrobe at her own expense.

Mollie knew, however, and she felt a trifle guilty. It was partly of course because Robbie's Catherine was such a dear, good patient child, and had worked for two years without a holiday. But it was also because Mollie and Peter firmly believed that a secret engagement, or at least an understanding, existed between Kate and Tom. And it was also because poor, dreary little Cecy seemed to depend upon Kate more than anybody else in the world; Kate would stir her up, keep her busy, distract her.

So Mollie and Kate went shopping, on a dreamy, warm Saturday morning in late June, and Kate came back to the Cunninghams' to lunch, ecstatic with excitement. Aunt Mollie had bought her a dress of handkerchief linen piped with blue, two ginghams, one green and one pink, two pairs of white shoes, and a spotted yellow and black calico.

"The caliker looks like a nigger dress, but that's the one she would have," Mollie said, indulgently, in the big cool dining room, serving fricasseed chicken generously, comfortably warm and wearied after the busy morning, and enjoying the rôle of

benefactress. "It was only four fifty. You'd wonder how they done it. Where's Baby? And where's Cecy?"

"Cecy went down to Chinatown, and Baby's over to Mullinses' —you said yourself he could go, Mollie," Allie said. "Baked potato, Kate?"

Kate was enjoying that delicious sense of unreality that the unexpected holiday gives. The morning of shopping, the free noon hour, and the prospect of an afternoon, evening, another whole free day and another and another—it was almost too sweet to be true! Six weeks of them ahead! And not all to be spent in the dingy cottage in Turk Street, either. Most of them up in the sweet piny freedom and silence of the camp, with the squawk of a jay and the splash of a big fish in the lake the only sounds of the heavenly blue mornings.

And added to all this, the handkerchief linen, the two ginghams, and the "nigger" calico. There was not a cloud in Kate's sky. All the dreary, drudging years, the sordidness and self-denial and deprivation had rolled away, had left her untouched; she had entered into this happy interval with the zest of a child.

Tom came in for lunch, looking thin and somewhat tired; "but that's the warmth of this spring heat on him," diagnosed his mother fondly and anxiously. She watched him come behind Kate's chair, catch her hand, and bend over the girl's exquisite raised face to kiss it, as naturally as he performed the same little ceremony of love with his mother.

"Them two!" Mollie thought. "You couldn't look at them and not know the whole of it!" mused Allie. And the glances of mother and aunt met in a deeply satisfied smile.

Tom wanted to know if Kate and Cecy would like to go to a picture to-night; John Kelly had suggested it. The idea was that the four of them go to dinner at New Frank's, and then take in a show. John and Cecy! Mollie's and Allie's eyes met triumphantly again. Everything was working out perfectly.

Kate managed to answer casually that she would love it, but she felt that with much more felicity her heart would burst. The big, pleasantly shaded room, the delicious food, the atmosphere of love and harmony, plans, freedom, new clothes——

Cecy came in, looking a little pale from the heat, and apologetic. She kissed her mother, slipped into her seat. There was a bloom, a radiance, a youthful appetite and zest once again apparent upon her; it became obvious that something pleasant had happened to her.

"Mama, what do you know about this? I met Dion in Sing Fat's."

Glances flew about the table, but Cecy was eating busily.

"Well, did you ever, dear," Mollie commented, mildly.

"He was getting a gong—what on earth he wants with a gong, goodness knows!" Cecy went on, merrily casual, and busy with her food. "And of course I was getting the lanterns for camp! I heard his voice saying, 'Don't trust that woman, John, her heap no good!' You can imagine how I felt! The Chinaman looked perfectly stupefied! So then we went around together, and he got me ginger, and he got you an idol, Ellen, it's out there in the hall, and we laughed so I thought we'd be arrested! He bought me a box, and I bought him a little china ship. He said we spent three dollars and used up seventeen dollars' worth of their time!"

She was so happy! She was the glowing, rosy, curly-headed Cecy of the shining blue eyes and the golden freckles once more. To everyone at the table there came a little emotion of sympathy and pleasure, and the conversation went on in a gale of pleasure and felicity.

"Dion came into Saint Mary's with me, I didn't ask him to," Cecy presently added. "I said that we usually went in, while we were waiting for the car, and he said he'd like to. He knelt down and everything, on one knee, you know, the way Protestants do? He goes to Los Angeles again next week, and I told him we were going to the Lake, bag and baggage, on Wednesday. But he said he'd surely be up at Tahoe, sooner or later, and I asked him to visit us. Was that all right, Mama?"

"Fine, lovey." And Mollie looked about the board, and wished that Papa had chanced to come home to lunch to-day. The children and life, and all her plans and hopes for both, hadn't seemed to be so happy for a long, long time. Baby

wasn't here, of course. Paul was nine now, and growing far too independent.

"Where's Baby?" someone suddenly asked, meeting her thoughts.

"Over to Mullinses'; I guess he's having his dinner there," Mollie answered, a little worried. "Go 'phome, Mart," she commanded, "and ask will Kane stop for him to bring him home later on?"

Kate burst into the story of the four gowns, the delightful plans for the evening. Mollie asked her eldest son in an undertone if he could take Ellen and Paul out to the Park with Lizzie, just drop them there?

"I've a date, but not until four," Tom answered, obligingly. His heart entered the apartment house on Gough Street, mounted in the elevator, rang a bell. "Mrs. Newman, Germaine?"

"Leave me take 'em, Mom," Martin said, returning to his chair, upsetting Paul's untouched glass of milk, which Annie, with a mild elevation of her eyebrows, began to mop up at once in an entirely accustomed manner, kicking Cecy in the shin, and catching his big knee on the tablecloth. "I could run the car. Harry Dimond——"

"What did they say about Paul?" Allie demanded. "Don't eat that baked potato skin, Ellen. They say—savin' your presence, Mollie—it scrapes the intestines, and many a one'll die of some disease like Bright's——"

"Oh, they said Paul started home half an hour ago, by himself," Martin reported, with a suddenly revived interest, "he said that Mom would let him. Mrs. Mullins said please to 'phone——"

"O blessed Jesus and the everlasting saints!" Mollie whispered, her full ruddy face turning ashen. "Tom—Tom—half an hour—and it's only three blocks to Mullinses'——!"

And then what? It all happened at once, and hundreds of times as all those present were destined to review what followed, they would always linger upon this terrible moment of coincidence: the quick alarm about Paul, the reverberating and quickly repeated ring at the front-door bell, their concerted and terrified

rush to the hall, and then from Allie, who was in the lead, a long fearful wail as it opened.

"Don't frighten his mother—all right, now, don't be scared ——" There were fifty craning and crowding persons on the steps, at least half as many voices spoke together. "He got knocked down—he's all right, now——" A big policeman in the lead, something limp and small dangling in his arms—a little, little boy, with blood drying across his ashen, unconscious face, and blood matted wet in the golden hair at his temples that had not yet lost their baby curl.

Then Mollie's piercing scream, and the crowd on the steps got what it had come for, the sight of the child's poor mother straining, sobbing, running from the group in the hall, shrieking:

"Oh, my God! Oh, God, have mercy! Oh, my child, my baby!"

Mart was holding her, his schoolboy face glistening with tears; Kate was holding her, white-faced, and with great terrified eyes on the crowd at the door. Ellen was screaming, Cecy sobbing and praying: "Oh, God, save my little brother; oh, God, save my little brother; oh, Mama—Mama—*don't!*"

Tom helped the policeman with Paul's limp body; the door was slammed in fifty hungry faces by an hysterical maid, the cortège was moving upstairs. Mollie had fainted, at the foot, and servants usually unseen in this neighbourhood, mysteriously appearing from the lower regions, were caring for her, with loud prayers and cries.

Allie had preceded them upstairs, Paul's big bed was turned down.

"You'd better wash him off, and get him undressed," the policeman—tenderly lowering the dusty little boots as Tom tenderly lowered the bloody head—said in an undertone, to Tom.

"Don't touch him," Allie said, firmly and quietly, at their elbows. "The doctor'll be here in a second; he's on his way now. I've just had him on the 'phome. Get a lot of hot water, Ida," she added, to a maid, "and ask Gertie for them old sheets I tore into squares awhile back. Be quiet, Cecy, and act like

Ellen here does," she added, to the noisily sobbing Cecy, whose teeth were chattering. Cecy, awed, fell silent, and Ellen looked erect and proud despite her pallor and wet eyes. "That's it, Mart, you've got the right idea," Allie, easily in command, and quite calm, added to Martin, who had buried his untidy boy's head in his big, red, warty hands, and was kneeling and murmuring wild, blind Hail Marys at the foot of the bed. "O'ny God can help the little feller now."

The girls fell on their knees, joined with shaking whispers in their brother's prayers. Tom, to whose hand Paul's unconscious little crushed hand loosely clung, gave his aunt one look. But it was a look of such passionate and grateful admiration as many a professional beauty never wins in a long life. And perhaps in such a look the patient, humble, slaving Allies of the world balance the scales.

"You're the wonder of the world!" Tom said. Allie said in a whisper:

"Go after that copper, Tom, and give him a twenty, and get his name and number. There's money in my black bag, in my handkerchief drawer."

Tom slipped away, just as Mollie, supported by two maids, came slowly in. She had a folded handkerchief in her plump hand, with which now and then she absently touched her swollen lips. Her face was oddly wet, as if the maids had dashed water into it, and her damp plain hair, pushed carelessly back, gave her an old look.

The praying children eyed her without interrupting their soft, frightened whispers, as she approached the bed. She stood looking down upon the unconscious child, the dusty shoes, the blood-soaked curls. A sob swelled slowly within her, and broke in a bitter ripple that shook her breast cruelly, and tore at her set lips with a whining sort of cry: "ooo——ooo——ooo!"

"Now, Mollie——" Allie warned her.

Mollie moved heavy eyes to her sister-in-law's face.

"The doctor?" she whispered, wiping her wet, swollen lips again. "Peter?"

"I telephoned Pop," Martin murmured, returned from the

hall. Immediately afterward the doctor, shocked and efficient, was in the room.

The strange day dragged on. Aunt Maggie was there, the little old grandmother was there, weeping. Peter, pale under his full healthy cheeks, was frequently to be found sitting beside the bed where Mollie lay, stretched desolate, stimulated with her first hypodermic, mentioning "digitalis," a new word, when Allie or Maggie or her mother came in to whisper beside her.

A quiet priest came in, calling Peter by his name, and speaking of Tom affectionately as "my godson." He knelt beside little Paul, so strangely tiny and bandaged and motionless now, and as they all knelt, praying, their eyes sought his face anxiously for comfort.

A nurse, as naturally Aunt Allie's enemy as is the hawk the hare's, was installed. Cecy was with her father and Ellen in the sitting room a good deal of the time; Peter seemed glad to have his girls with him. Each took an arm of his big chair, and as he embraced them, he leaned his tired forehead against one slender little body and then the other, and they talked of Paul. Of what the baby had meant to Mommy and him, after little Daisy died, and of what a cunning baby Paul had been. Kate was everywhere, helpful, brave, loving, efficient, calm.

"She's like a sister to them all already," Peter told the priest, "and as dear as any one of them to the poor mother and me. Her and Tom, there——"

"Well, it's only half a cousinship," the other returned, eyeing the two young persons thoughtfully, as they conferred with serious faces in an angle of the downstairs hall. "That might be a very happy thing for you all."

It was Kate who brought Peter a cup of hot tea, at five o'clock, and firmly and coaxingly saw that he drank it; Kate who suggested cheerfully that since Aunt Mollie was going to worry herself sick anyway, she would be no worse in a big chair in Paul's room, where she could watch him; and it was Kate who fought the latter point with the nurse, and won.

Miss Singleton thought it would be much better to have the little boy's mother in another room.

"She's worrying about him," Kate explained, superintending Tom, as he moved pillows and stools.

"Then she'd very much better not be near him—he's a very sick little boy," Miss Singleton suggested, pleasantly and firmly.

"Then she'll simply make herself worse," Kate countered, more pleasantly and more firmly.

"Doctor, this wasn't my idea——" the nurse murmured, when the doctor came back with a colleague, at six, to find Mollie pale, tragic, unspeakably fearful, propped up in pillows, and moving her fingers from bead to bead of her rosary, only a few feet away from Paul's bed.

"That's all right," said the doctor, with a brief nod. And from the second that was reported, everyone in the house loved the doctor, with laughter and tears, and felt that the nurse had been very neatly scored.

The new doctor eyed Paul thoughtfully.

"I think I wouldn't disturb him," he decided, with a quiet nod. He touched the bandages, feeling bones and muscles gently, and Mollie could have shrieked. He sat down, laid clever fingers upon the little white-wrapped hand. "Well, I guess you've had a pretty rough time of it, little boy," he said, kindly.

He took a chair beside the bed. Minutes went by.

"H'm!" said the new doctor then, getting up.

That was all. Downstairs they all gathered about him, and told him about it: the child had crossed in mid-street, run out from between two parked cars—it was nobody's fault—it was nobody's fault—the darling, the *darling*, he was just running home for his lunch! They were all in tears again.

"And what do you think, Doctor?" It was Peter, hoarse, awkward, pale.

"We-el, there's a good pulse there."

"Never had a sick day in his life!" Allie, red-eyed, combative, her arms crossed firmly on her lean breast, said with a snap. The doctor moved his eyes to hers speculatively.

"He has a chance, Mr. Cunningham. A fighting chance. Impossible to say now what the shock has been. There may be a spinal fracture. We dare not move him just now."

"It'll kill his mother—he bein' the baby, as you might say," Peter faltered, his reddened, shrewd, tear-wet eyes searching the other man's face for a glimmer of hope.

"We'd like to get an X-ray, of course," said the doctor, thoughtfully, "but there's the danger of moving him just now."

Tom, feeling himself contemptible, had just returned from a low-toned telephone conversation with Babette, in his own room. He put a bracing big arm about his father's shoulders, and they faced the doctor together. Peter seemed strangely small, sunken, and old.

"There's no hope—they think he'll go in the night!" Kate, sobbing, told John Kelly, when John called, horrified and amazed, at eight o'clock. Cecy sobbed, clung to her cousin. Tom, looking white and dishevelled, came out to take charge of John.

"Go in and talk to my father, John, just to distract him, I'm going up to my mother," he said.

Yet this was Saturday night, and on Sunday night at the same time Paul opened big shadowed eyes, and looked straight into the eyes of his father, kneeling beside him, and Peter, kissing his little helpless hand, whispered, "God love my laddie-buck! He's goin' to pull through for his old daddy's sake!"

After that Peter always came into Paul's room in the mornings, to ask the flat little wreck of babyhood in the bed: "Who you goin' to pull through for?" And Paul's lips always smiled, and he answered, "Yo-o-o-u!" And after a few days, only they seemed months to the watching family, Peter added, "And what do you want Mr. Emporium to go home and tell Mrs. Emporium that the little Cunningham boy got to-day?" and Paul would say, in a reedy little voice that grew stronger and stronger daily, "Blocks!" or "Ozma of Oz!"

They were only three weeks late in starting for camp, after all. The doctors agreed that that was the place for the child, after the operation, to build him up and keep him quiet, and Mollie, greyer, thinner, with a haunted look in her gentle eyes, was glad to get away.

He might walk again, on crutches, jerk that injured spine of

his about, it was extremely probable that he would. And the fingers, the four firm little babyish dirty fingers that she and Allie had kissed every time they washed them with a damp rag, were gone from the left hand. Thank God, said the sisters and aunts, it wasn't the right! Thank God the child was alive! Thank God it wasn't the brain! Thank God he didn't suffer, after the first feverish, uncomfortable days of anæsthetics and readjustments.

But Mollie couldn't thank God for anything. She was crushed, silenced, dazed by the blow. Her baby mutilated, pitied, limping, handicapped at the very start! What sorrow ever borne was like unto this sorrow of hers?

Cecy and her love affair, Tom's going abroad—but they were so well, so strong, so complete through these crises! Daisy, exquisitely dying at three—yes, but that wasn't a living horror like this. Before he ever knew that he was mortally crippled, the precious, perfect body of the baby was laid low. Saying as they did over and over that Kate was an angel, and Tom the prop and stay of them all, and that Peter had aged twenty years, the women of the family agreed that "it'd all but kill poor Mollie on them!"

After all, it was Martin who came in for the most surprising praises, when they sadly, and incessantly, in low tones, talked about it all. Martin, up to now a mere awkward responsibility, a clumsy great overgrown animal who teased his sisters and whose repentance and better moods were as annoying and disastrous to household comfort as his accidents and mischief, Martin had been oddly matured by his little brother's catastrophe.

They had all, astonished, watched his gentleness, witnessed his resourcefulness, his capability. It was Martin who invariably suggested what Paul wanted when the hurt little mouth was too thick for speech.

"He'd take orange juice," Martin would suggest, watching him. "I bet he'd like some ice to suck. I bet he'd like applesauce, hearing you all talk about it, wouldn't you, Baby?"

And as the injured child would nod faintly, Cecy or Allie or

Kate would fly trembling to the telephone: "Doctor, could he have a taste of apple-sauce? He says he'd like it!"

Martin could always make him laugh, even if it were no more than at Martin's own dirty thumb that he walked over counterpane and pillows, as a mannikin.

"Here's Holy Joe," Martin would announce, as the thumb peeped out of hiding. And Paul's weary eyes would brighten and his sore little mouth twitch. Even when Martin sprawled his ungainly and giant length upon the bed, he never seemed to hurt his brother. "Holy Joe," little Paul would plead, at the end of the long, weary day. And Kate would think Martin actually inspired as he announced:

"Holy Joe's mother gave him a licking this morning for going out in the streets without his pants on. He's going to get into the dairy before his mother comes in with the milk tonight—here she is, carrying the pans along, and not seeing him—and boong! whoopety-whoop goes the milk!"

"Is that the baby laughin'?" Peter would ask, astonished, in the hall. Mollie, always before this undemonstrative with Mart, often kissed her second son, nowadays, as she passed him, and Kate was so charming with him, and so appreciative, that Martin got his first violent touch of secret passion for this beautiful older cousin. Kate got a doll two inches long, in the Chinese quarter, a strange wild-headed little creature of wire and plaster, and this became "Holy Joe."

Presently Holy Joe had a bear, on a real chain, and having a magic carpet that conveyed him out of any trouble, to the ecstatic and triumphant shouting of Paul, he survived a series of blood-curdling adventures. As soon as Martin came into the house, Paul's imperative, joyous little voice could be heard calling, "Holy Joe, Mart! Mar-r-t! Holy Joe!"

And Mart would fly upstairs, snatch an apple whose noisy consumption commonly punctuated Holy Joe's history, and wheel to Paul's bed the table that contained the blocks trains, tin soldiers, and toy ships that were all opposed solidly to Holy Joe.

The summer camp was upon the steep, piny slopes of a blue deep lake; there was a pebbly beach, and near it a cooking fire

place made of rounded stones and a long pine table under great trees on the shore. Behind these were the cottages, two- and three-room unplastered shelters with porches railed with slim redwoods still wearing their plushy bark. The big hotel, where the family usually dined every night, was three miles away.

Hitherto Mollie and Peter had merely rented two of the four or five cabins, trusting to chance that their neighbours would be congenial. But this year they took all the cabins, bringing two of their own maids to the camp for the first time, and a Chinese cook. This was to be no casual holiday of a few weeks, the camp was a retreat this year, and the months of resting and fresh air were to save Paul, and perhaps his mother as well. A tutor was to come daily to coach Martin, who would enter college in the fall, in Latin and mathematics, and when school opened Ellen was to go back as a boarder. But Allie, Mollie, and the precious invalid would remain in the health-giving mountains until the coming of cold weather. Mollie said that she never wanted to see the city again!

To bird-calls and mysterious splashes in the lake they all awakened at about eight o'clock, and Kate and Ellen and Mart always made a rush for the cold water, screaming and swimming noisily for a short five minutes. Then, chattering and shuddering, they breakfasted under the trees, with the satin stretch of the water spread before them, reaching unbroken to the steep opposite shores that were so thickly clothed with rising files of pines.

Paul was carried down to this meal, and usually afterward Ellen and he had their blocks, and "Lotto" and "Parchesi," and the odorous plastic clay, and the kindergarten needles and wool, and all the rest of their paraphernalia out, to spread upon the plain pine boards.

Meanwhile Cecy and Kate whirled through bed-making; stopped to gossip with Mart, who was raking, or chopping wood; gathered flowers for the table and the bedrooms; brushed leaves and threads from the clean pine floors; talking, laughing at the Chinese; falling into long reminiscent conversations with Mollie and Allie, dusters in hand.

Then they would all gather at the table; Mollie would take Paul's cramped little body into her big arms, now, and the talk went on, to an accompaniment of pea-shelling or of darning.

"What time do Uncle Peter and Tom get here?"

"Gracious goodness, that's true! It's Friday again. Did you make Tom's bed? I guess they'll be up on the supper bus."

"Mom, if the fish boy comes, do you want trout again?"

"Cecy, next time Tom and John are here, let's really do what we always say we're going to do—row across there and climb up to that peak? We'll take some sandwiches—will you do it, Mart?"

"Sure, I'll do it! Only you'll have to have a pruning saw or a brush hook or something. Sure, let's do it."

"Why don't you girls take the boat now and go for a good row? It's goin' to be awful hot later on. Two years ago that poor woman had a sunstroke——"

"Well, those girls down at the hotel sort of half suggested that we come down for some tennis. Did you clean the car, Mart? Feel like it, Cecy?"

"Don't scrape the back of your heels together like that, Mart. No wonder your stockin's always look——"

"Look, Mom! That was a great *big* boy! Look, where the water's all ripply! Gee, he was a *monster*——"

"Your aunt was speakin' to you, Martin."

"I wasn't sayin' nothin' to him, Mollie. It was only about his socks, and God knows he don't wear them out the way Tom does."

And so on and on, through the sweet-scented, warm, idle hours, while the sun grew stronger and stronger, dazzling on the lake, and the resinous scent of the pines drifted on the still air. The man with the berries rattled in, in a dirty surrey, and the fish boy came, draped in the stiffening silver scales of his prey, and the odours from Wong's kitchen, boiling peaches and asparagus, sweet baking bread, grew more and more appealing.

Mollie never spoke, the whole summer long, without a sharp preliminary sigh, but to all the others, Paul included, these were

happy days. Cecy had a new friend, a Miss Ethel Merry, who was one of Dion Taylor's own particular set, in Burlingame, and twice during the summer Cecy packed a suitcase daintily, and went radiantly off to spend a week-end with Ethel. The first was not quite perfect, because Dion was in the South, playing golf in a tournament, but from the second visit Cecy returned ecstatic, exhausted with felicity. It had all been so amusing, and so glorious, and Dion had been so funny—she quoted the things Dion had said, for days. The country club, and dancing, and her first polo game had intoxicated Cecy; she wanted to do some "nice little thing" for Ethel, who was rich, and older than she, and so terribly kind to her.

"This Miss Merry's mother, is she nice?" Mollie asked.

"Oh, she's away, Mama. She's getting a divorce! She's going to marry a man from New York."

"Oh-h-h?" Peter asked, from the head of the table. And Mollie wished devoutly that she had not started the topic. "Where's the father?" Peter went on, slowly. "How did Cecy meet this young lady, Mama?" he added.

"Why, we met her a long while back," Mollie explained somewhat haltingly. "An' then she come up here to the hotel for a dance last month."

"Well, I don't know as I'd encourage——" Peter began, mildly, and stopped. Kate and Cecy exchanged a reassuring glance. Ethel was going East next week anyway; Peter's disapproval had been expressed just a trifle late.

Ethel, however, as far as Cecy's secret hopes were concerned, had served her turn. Dion had seen Cecy, pretty and gay, flitting about among the beautiful lawns and gardens of his own sacred environment, and Dion had so far renewed his attentions as to send Cecy a telegram, early in August, to the effect that he was coming up to see her.

This threw Cecilia into a momentary flutter of ecstasy, but immediately she turned from a pretty, spontaneous, unself-conscious girl into a wretchedly fretting old woman for ten burning days. A touch of poison-oak on her shoulder distressed her beyond measure, she slept badly for several nights,

and was all nerves, the fear that strawberries would not be procurable, and the cook give them his tiresome old ice-cream instead of his really unusual strawberry shortcake, and finally, the mischance that two of the best dancing men left the hotel the day before Dion came, all caused her anxious impatience.

She said she looked a fright, and she really did look something much less than her usual pretty self. She fought her mother and father to tears upon the point of their dining at the hotel on Saturday night, or just having their usual home dinner beside the lake, with a later attendance at the dance. Any talk of being chaperoned threw her into a rage.

The actual week-end, when Dion talked of other girls, and Cecilia was wearied and excited, was a failure. But it was pleasant to remember, to add to that growing score of small proofs that Cecilia really counted in his life.

John came up almost every week-end. Kate would see the car roll in, see the squarely built figure get out on one side as Uncle Peter tumbled out the other, see the men reach for suitcases and boxes of candy and magazines.

No need for her to hurry, worry, rage. It was Friday afternoon again, with soft twilight creeping across the peaceful surface of the blue lake, and insects humming and whirling in the long shafts that fell through the feathery redwood boughs. Opposite the camp, the rising files of redwood spires caught the last golden banners of sunshine, the warm still air was scented with pine resin, and with the good smell of Wong's finger rolls, baking. Far below them, in the valley, the night was mysteriously gathering, in streamers of violet gauze.

"Hello, Kate."

"Hello, John. Hot in the city?"

"Freezing. Fog and wind. But it was hot in the train. I think I'll go in swimming."

That, or something as unimportant, was all. Yet, as John turned up toward the guest-cabin, for his bathing-suit, Kate might rest her bright head against a velvety red tree-trunk, rising like a great mast a hundred feet above her, and close her eyes, and breathe deep in a very suffocation of bliss.

John saw Kate beloved, followed, indispensable, heard her praised, heard Tom's "When can I see you a sec, Kate?" and Cecy's "Kate, read that, and see if you think it's all right." He knew that Paul's little three-cornered white face brightened when she came in; he knew what Peter and Mollie thought of her, he saw her seized at the dances by a score of young men whose very names he did not know.

And Kate knew that all this was incessantly before his eyes, and that she had only to bide her time. Joyous, friendly, exquisite in the "nigger" calico or the handkerchief linen, she slipped into her place beside him, at the happy meals beside the lake, smiled into his eyes as she asked him questions, fell into deep conversations with him and Cecy and Tom, while the light dropped, and lingered, and was gone, and when lamps bloomed in the raw little cabins, and Peter snored peacefully in his long reading chair.

Night noises in the great woods that were shutting down behind them, blacker and blacker; they would hear the crack of a dry branch, the creaking hoot of an owl, the squawk of an awakened bird. The girls reached for sweaters. And from the broad lake that was like a pool of ink, a regular soft rippling wash, and sometimes the put-put-put and moving, insignificant light of a motor-boat.

"If you love a man, nothing else matters!" This from Cecy.

"Oh, Cecy—respect and companionship!" Kate would say.

"Oh, nonsense, Kate! Those things aren't *love*."

"I think they are. Don't you, John?"

"Well, it seems to me they're important——" John's voice would say, slowly.

"Nix." This was Tom. "Love's something else again. You lose sight of companionship and logic, and whether your family'll like it——"

"Exactly!" Cecy would agree, triumphantly. "You kind of go—crazy!"

"You could love a man, respect him, long to be near him, to

raise children, to spend the rest of your life with him," Kate's beautiful voice would say steadily, "without that crazy, wild-eyed, jealous, frantic feeling!"

"Shows how much you know about it, Catherine dear! You've never been in love."

"I *have* been in love!"

"Ah—no—no—no!" And Cecy's voice would hold a ring of longing and pain. She had suffered, she was not happy now, but she knew what love was!

And then the yellow summer moon would rise, clear and full, behind the pines, and streaks of liquid silver would pierce the branches above them, and turn the woods to magic, and strike a twinkling path straight to the lifted furry tops of the trees across the lake. All the feathery underbranches of the redwoods would be aureoled with the unearthly brilliance, blots of inky shadows everywhere. And the young persons would rise, to shout rapturously, "Come out, Mom! Uncle Peter, do just wake up to *look* at this moon!"

And presently they would all be out on the lake, catching up glittering handfuls of the icy water splashed with light, and singing all the songs they knew.

So all the little boats come sailing home across the sea——

"God send their boats safely home, them four!" Peter would say, hearing them as he undressed.

But Mollie could make no cheerful answer now. Let Kate and Tom and Jawn and Cecy do what they would! Nothing would give her back that dreaming May morning when little Paul had asked so importantly: "Kin I go over to Bernard Mullins's?"

If she had sent Kane for him—if she and Kate, coming home triumphantly from their shopping, had but stopped for him! If Lizzie had but reminded her, if Allie——

Cecy back from Chinatown, Tom and Kate gossiping, herself helping fricasseed chicken, so glad to be fed, seated, and back in her own big quiet house again. And, at that very instant, the

child running out of the Mullinses' gate, whole and sound and firm upon his square little legs—and never to be whole and sound and square in life again!

"It would be easier if they'd kilt him on me," she sometimes said, quietly, lifelessly, with watering eyes, to Allie or Maggie.

"Oh, Mollie, don't say that, dear! The Lord has His own good reasons for sendin' triles to this one and that!"

CHAPTER XIV

ONE heavenly August Sunday, of fragrant pine needles and steadily shining sun, Kate and John found themselves scrambling down a mountain trail, somewhat in the rear of Cecy, Peter, Mart, Tom, Ellen, and some other young persons who had joined them for a hard Sunday walk.

They had had luncheon high up in the mountains, beside an icy spring, Kate capably engineering the little coffee grill, Tom producing the bottle of cream from a side pocket, the other girls snapping the strings of sandwich boxes and licking their fingers free of the too-soft cake frosting.

Now everyone was flushed, happily tired, torn by twigs and conscious of prickers in shoes, sunburned, tumbled, and glad to strike at last the straight trail that led them a downward two miles directly into camp.

"John," Kate said, in an odd tone. He turned in the path. "Let the others get a little bit ahead," the girl said, with a nod. "I want to talk to you."

Handsome and grave and attentive, and with a little apprehensive paleness coming under his country brown, he delayed his steps, and they walked along slowly, side by side.

"I want to tell you something, John. But it must be in absolute confidence!" said Kate.

"I suppose I know what it is?" John made himself say, in the silence. And he gave her his good smile.

"Has Tom ever spoken to you about it?" the girl asked, quickly.

He knew now. "No, but of course I've suspected it."

"John," Kate told him, seriously, widening the beautiful starry blue eyes under her rough little tramping hat, "he sees her *almost* every day! And she's *divorced*, you know——"

John Kelly, thirty years old, and supporting himself in a harsh, cold world for sixteen of them, experienced the most staggering emotion of his life. Kate, fortunately too deeply and anxiously absorbed in what she was saying to take particular note of his manner, had stopped short, and was staring at him significantly, fearfully, impressively.

Behind her, pines, and far below, the lake. All about the sweetness of the silent afternoon woods. A jay hopped near them, flashed away with a bright streak of blue.

There she stood, with Tom's old gloves on her hands, and an open blue shirt of Peter's, washed sky white, meeting her sturdy, shabby, faded corduroy skirt. Her honest beautiful face burned by the sun, her blue eyes preoccupied, the aureole of her hair pressed in little moist gold rings against her rough little round hat.

John's throat grew dry, everything tipped and dazzled before him. Tom in love with somebody else? But then—but then——

"I'm going to tell you about it," Kate was saying quickly, "although it means breaking my word. I've got to, or I'll go crazy. They're all being so lovely to me, they're all so pleased —the darlings!—to think that Tom and I—that Tom—that I would ever—or that he would, for that matter——"

She stopped, floundering.

"You mean they believe that he's in love with you?" asked John's voice. He was conscious of a frightened determination that he mustn't betray himself, mustn't ever let her know that he, too, had been planning all his life, selecting his every word and movement, under that very misapprehension.

"Exactly!" she said, scarlet yet laughing. "Of course he's *not*."

"Of course," John echoed, clearing his throat, and speaking rather flatly.

"He's in love with this Mrs. Newman, who is getting a divorce," Kate summarized, rapidly. "She has a flat out on Gough or Octavia Street or somewhere, and she really seems to be an awfully nice woman; Tom got to know her in Paris, and

he's—well, he's just *drunkenly* in love! He doesn't think about anything else, he's there all the time. And she is an orthodox Jewess, John, the niece of a rabbi, Rabbi Garberg—so you can imagine! Aunt Mollie would rather see him in his shroud than married out of the Church, and as far as *I* can see her people would considerable rather see *her* in hers. And neither Aunt Mollie nor Uncle Peter has the remotest notion of it!"

"You mean he wants—expects—to marry her, Kate?"

"Well, I don't *know*. But the thing is, he's mad about her, and—some time last spring this was—he told her so. Well, then she was wild, said she never intended to marry again, and would live for the child——"

"A child?"

"She has a little girl. So she and Tom had a fight, and it almost killed him. But after a few days they made it up, and then he told me that he was under promise not to breathe another word of it until she got her divorce—and that's just before next New Year's. But they saw each other."

"For the Lord's sweet sake!" John murmured, unable to assimilate this totally unsuspected news.

"Yes. We'd better keep walking," Kate said, "or they'll suspect us of some plot. Well! Up to the time we came up here, Tom told me everything. He used to come into the Library and talk about her for hours—the little dimple she had in her temple, and the way she frowned at him, and had to smile in spite of herself, and all that."

"For the Lord's sweet sake!" John commented again, in healthy contempt. And as he spoke he noted the adorable trick she had of blinking once or twice rapidly when she wished to be especially emphatic.

"But these last months," Kate continued, worriedly, "Tom hasn't talked so much. And I don't like it! I imagine it's gone—pretty far with them both. And then, this very week-end, Uncle Peter was talking to me about going back to the Library—I ought to be back there on the twenty-first, you know, and that's a week from to-morrow. And I've had several unexpected weeks of holiday as it is. And darling Uncle Peter

talked about my being—in a way"—Kate qualified apologetically—"a comfort to poor Aunt Mollie while Paul has been so ill, and all that, and he asked me so sweetly if I wanted to go back at all, and he spoke of—he really spoke," she went on, in a worried voice, "as if Tom and I had it practically all settled, and as if you and Cecy——"

"Cecilia and I!" John exclaimed, reddening. "Why, what on *earth*——"

"No, I don't mean that you had it settled!" Kate hastened to explain. "But that perhaps he might hope that some day you would."

"But Cecy certainly has a case—a terrible case on young Taylor," John offered, simply.

"But, John——" began Kate. She had to say it! It was so delicious to be talking to him at last, about these tremendous and thrilling things, to be murmuring confidentially, intimately with him, with his handsome face at one instant so grave, and the next so flashing with interest, at one minute concerned, at the next smiling his own peculiarly irradiating smile. "John," she accused him, smilingly, "you *did* like Cecy?"

"I thought she was very nice when she was quite a little girl," he admitted, innocently. "I don't know that I ever told any one—I'm sure I didn't. But I used to think she was a very dear, sweet little girl, when they were talking about her going into the convent."

"Oh, so we did!" Kate recalled, struck, pausing again before they limped into camp. "I remember that!"

"But then, Kate—then, Kate," John said, awkwardly, in their last moment together, "then I hope you will marry somebody else than Tom, because you certainly deserve that some fine man—should make you happy—if you loved him——" stumbled on poor John, so bewildered by new hopes and fears that he hardly knew what he was saying, or what he wanted to say.

Later, hammering down toward the city with Peter and Tom, he flushed, bit his lip, paled, and flushed again, thinking of the confused absurdity of this stammered speech. She so composed, so sweetly attentive and natural, and he, clearing

his throat, laughing, growing red, avoiding her look. "Some fine man!" Would she remember that particular ill-selected phrase, and think he had been alluding to himself? Why couldn't he have said: "Kate, have I any chance?" Or why couldn't he at least have said: "Kate, may I tell you some day what all this gives me the right to hope?"

To-morrow would be Monday. On Saturday night, perhaps, beside the long table under the trees, filling the dinner glasses with spring water, perhaps reading about the Patchwork Girl to Paul, perhaps laughing and murmuring with Cecy, down at the lake's edge, he would see the sweet, slender figure, the shining hair, the straight clean line of her chin, he would hear that rich, laughing voice of hers! John's entire week was spent in thinking what he would say to her.

She had seized one single fortuitous minute this evening to say to him: "Advise me. Ought I tell Uncle Peter?" and John, after the supper which they had all said they were too tired to eat, and had eaten enormously, had seized another to answer: "Tell Tom *he* has to tell his father!"

CHAPTER XV

TOM, approached by Kate a few days later, flatly refused to consider this.

"Why worry Pop?" asked Tom. "He's got enough on his mind. There's nothing to tell him, anyway."

"You mean she won't be free until December?"

"She doesn't think she'll be free then!" Tom laughed mirthlessly, briefly. "Religion's a funny thing, Kate," he added. "You'd think it would be something to make a person happier, wouldn't you? Instead of coming between a perfectly sane, straight, decent man and woman of—well, in the middle twenties," substituted Tom, who was extremely sensitive about Babette's twenty months' seniority, and never alluded to it,—"and making them miserable! What business is it of theirs? If I love her, and she loves me, and I can make her a home, and she can give me everything I want ~~in God's~~ world without harming anybody, who's business is it but ours? Why should Mom cry her eyes out, and Aunt Allie and Aunt Mag think I'm going straight to hell, and Babette be badgered to death by *her* family——?" He shrugged, lighted a cigarette. "It's funny," he finished. "All in the name of God and religion!"

"Any rules that are made for everybody hurt somebody, sometimes," Kate generalized, mildly. Inwardly she was terrified. This was no way for a Cunningham to talk! "Do you like her as much as ever, Tom?" she asked, timidly.

Tom smiled at her, his handsome face one wide grin, his blue eyes twinkling.

"Pretty near," he answered. And Kate knew that he and Babette thoroughly understood each other, and that Tom was not afraid of anything coming between them.

"But, Tom, won't you talk to your father?"

"Nix, sweetheart. It wouldn't do any good, and it would only worry Pop. No," Tom mused, half aloud, "some day we may walk around the corner and get married, and then'll be time enough!"

But he talked to Babette about it.

"Kate says we ought to tell Pop," he said, kissing her soft little ear where the silky dark hair curled about it. Babette was where she loved to be, curled up in his big arms, and both were watching a September fire.

"And what do you think, my dear?" her voice asked, idly, the subtle little oriental hint in the tone thrilling him as it never failed to thrill him.

"I think not."

"And I think not! Tom, we'll never be so happy again, once any one knows. And we're so happy——"

"The family comes home next week," Tom told her, after a while. "And then it won't be so easy for me to get away evenings."

"And Jean comes home to stay," Babette sighed and smiled. "Fancy my even being a little sorry about *that!*" she said. "But this has been the only real happiness in my life. And it *can't* be wrong, whatever they say, to be so happy."

"My girl!" Tom said, kissing her hair.

"Tom, what's going to come out of it all?" the woman asked, out of a silence.

"Our marriage, my darling."

"As easy as all that?" she asked, between a sigh and a laugh.

"Our marriage, very simply and quietly, both being free, white, and twenty-one," Tom pursued. "And then we take a little apartment—I'd like this one——"

"I wouldn't!" interrupted Babette, and shuddered.

"Well, no, neither would I. But I mean something like this one, and we have our little girl trotting to school, and our music, and books, and you lunch downtown with me whenever you feel like it——"

"Which would be every day," Babette interpolated, kissing him.

"Which would be every day. And we have our few friends, who come to dinner——"

"Not too often, Tom!"

"Not oftener than once every ten years," he reassured her, and Babette laughed. "And then we have an occasional concert, movies, theatres, Sundays off in the country with the car—I'll have my own car then. And gradually the family—or families, rather—will forgive us, and all's well on the Rappahannock!" finished Tom. "They'll want us long before we'll want them, sweetheart, believe you me!"

"And none of this sneaking and story-telling!" added Babette, with a deep sigh.

"None of this sneaking and story-telling—all out in the open."

"And the feeling that I belong to you, and everyone knows it, and not bribing Germaine, and ashamed to look my mother in the eye," the woman summarized. "And never—never, Tommy," she said, with hot cheeks, pushing a little thumb into each of his own cheeks, as she sat with her feet curled under her knees, and the blue eyes whose look she would not meet only a few inches away, "never feeling sorry that—that——"

"Oh, cut it!" he said, tenderly, amusedly, as she paused.

"I feel so—so astonished at myself, Tom. Jean's mother."

"Oh, cut it, sweetheart. We love each other. Don't be ashamed to let me know you love me."

"Tom, we aren't bad, then?"

"Bad? Why, my dear girl, what a silly way to talk! What could possibly be *bad* about it?"

Babette rested quietly against his breast, her fingers locked in his, his dreamy eyes on the fire. Besides the flickering soft light there was only that of one dim lamp in the little room.

"Marrying a man you hate for money, *that's* where the badness comes in—all these made marriages, with no real love in them, that's the real sin!" Tom said, after a while.

"But people don't say so, the world doesn't say so, Tom."

"Yes, and the world is a place made up of filthy, hypocritical, stupid, vile-minded asses!" Tom assured her, good-humouredly.

"Tom, would your father be very angry if some day we were to marry?"

"*Would*, did you say, or *will*?"

"Well——" She laughed softly. "*Will*, then."

"No—I don't know. I suppose he will, for a while, but on the other hand he may be awfully decent about it. He adores the whole crowd of us."

"He sounds so nice," Babette said, wistfully. "Perhaps, some day," she added, rather low, "if there was a—an unusually nice little—person—named Peter, in the family, he'd forgive me."

Tom trembled. He bunched her soft little fingers in his to kiss them.

"He'll love you long before that, sweet."

"But your mother won't," Babette predicted, quickly.

"You and Mother will adore each other, because you're the two finest women I've ever known!" Tom assured her, calmly.

"And who comes third?

"Well, I suppose Kate, my cousin, Catherine Walsh."

"Sometimes," Babette confessed, smiling, "I get a little jealous of your Kate——"

And as Tom returned a thoughtful and affectionate "Kate's a wonder," she fell silent. Presently, with a little touch of weariness and coldness, she sent him away.

"Listen, darling, it isn't ten. Germaine never gets back until after eleven; she and her gang go to the nine-o'clock show."

"Yes, but she might come in—and you were here until ten last night."

"Tired of me, Babette?" he asked, a little hurt, smiling down at her. They were standing now, near the door.

"Tired of everything, myself—life!" she answered, her tears coming, as she rested her face against his shoulder. "It's all so stupid, Tommy!" she whispered.

"May I come to-morrow afternoon?"

"Oh——!" She raised her head quickly, and at her astonished and alarmed tone they both laughed. "Oh,—you *must!*"

He kissed her gently, went quietly away. She had been in a different mood, he remembered, upon a certain evening a few weeks ago, when radiant in some shimmering silky thing, and thrilled by the glorious music they had been evoking at the piano she had held his hand tight while he had slammed the door dutifully, to impress a possibly wakeful Germaine, and had flung herself in a silent ecstasy of mirth and recklessness into his arms a second later.

But he loved all her moods, indeed he held everything about her in a reverence and devotion deeper than anything that had ever come into his life before. He trembled at the mere thought of her—his little, winsome, clever, trusting Babette. She was so full of fears, conventions, imagination.

"Tommy, are we playing with fire?" she asked him, a hundred times. And a hundred times he answered patiently:

"My darling, if it were not for you I *would* plunge into the fire! There would be none of this wretched waiting for a legal thing called a decree, and for a license, between you and me then! They could chatter themselves to death, I would never know it! We are only waiting because of your mother, and mine. Nothing could make you more my wife than you are this minute, and nothing our love ever brings us is going to seem wrong—to me!"

To-night, glowing with tenderness, hope, all the felicity of the lover who knows himself beloved, he walked all the long way home, and entered the big house in Howard Street to find Cecilia awaiting him.

She was sitting up in her big bed, reading in a pool of light, with her curly dark hair in two short braids on her shoulders. Ellen was in boarding-school now, and Cecy had the big room to herself. Her mother and Paul were still in the mountains, but were expected to return in a few days. Meanwhile, Aunt Allie and the servants were getting the house in order, keeping an eye on Cecy and Martin, and taking care of Peter and Tom, who came home every night.

"Come in," Cecy invited her brother. "Shut that door. Is"— she lowered her voice cautiously—"is Pop's light out?"

"Yep. It's after eleven," Tom said, conscious of a slight

sense of reluctance to be forced to think of anything but Babette. "What's up?"

"Nothing's *up*," Cecy answered in a somewhat worried tone. And now Tom noticed that she looked both frightened and pale.

"What you been doing?" asked Tom, curiously.

"Nothing," Cecy said again, quickly. "Only—— Did you shut that, Tom?"

"Sure," Tom answered, lighting a cigarette.

"The thing is—and if Aunt Allie snoops in here, for heaven's sake be ready to talk about something else," Cecilia began again, nervously. "The thing is—and I know there's nothing in it, only—only I was wondering if maybe—maybe you'd *think* there was!"

"For the Lord's sake, *say* something!" Tom suggested.

"Well, here's what it is, Tom," the girl began, in a very low tone. "You know Dion's crowd—the Merrys and the Nortons and Jim Hungerford, and the two Pitcher boys—that crowd? Well, it was that crowd specially, although everybody else was in it, for the start—that is, we were all dancing and all that, at the Burlingame Club—there were grown-ups there, playing bridge, and all that——"

"When was this?"

"Last night."

"Oh, I see. Go on. Who were you staying with last night?"

"With Ethel Merry."

"Where?"

"Down at her house in San Mateo."

"Did Mom know it?"

"Well, no, because Ethel just invited me yesterday, over the telephone—said there was going to be dancing, and so on, just asked me down."

"Did you ask Aunt Allie?"

"In a way I did. I telephoned her at Grandma's, and she said she didn't like it with my mother out of town, and I said Mom would let me go down to Ethel's, and she said to telephone

my father, and I did, and he had gone down to the warehouse, and so I—just went."

"And did Pop jump you to-night?"

"No, he didn't say anything about it. I guess he thought I'd asked Mama."

"Who took you down?"

"Dion and the Pitchers."

"Yes, and who chaperoned the dance?"

"There wasn't any special one. We were just all there together."

"Yes, but who'd you and the Merry girl go with?"

"Well, that was just it." Cecilia began to look worried again. "Her aunt was going, and then when we got to the club, she wasn't there."

"So you dined alone at the club with a lot of boys and Ethel Merry? ~~My Lord~~, you must be loose, Cecy——"

"*Excuse* me. We dined at Ethel's, she and I and three boys. You know her mother's off on her honeymoon in Europe, and her father's sick in the hospital. But they have a lovely maid that her mother and father have had ten years, and the old Chinaman who just loves to cook——"

"Yes, but who looks out for Ethel?"

"Well, her father, of course. And his being in the hospital and her mother just married again was one reason she wanted me to go down and stay with her."

"Go on."

"There's nothing to it, really. After dinner Dion suggested that we go over to the club and dance, and we did—and *that* was all right, except that I felt sort of uncomfortable, not belonging to any party, but Ethel knows everybody—she's a regular terror, you know, but they all seem terribly fond of her—and so at about—well, a little after ten, we decided to go home, and Dion said his car had a flat, and that Jim Hungerford would drive us home."

"You ought to know better than that, Cecy," Tom said, gravely.

"But now *listen!*" Cecy pleaded, impatiently. "I know what kind of a man Jim is, and I took Dion aside and said, no, I wouldn't do that. And Dion was—he was all *right*, but he was a little silly—that is, he drank a little—you do that yourself, Tom!" Cecy interrupted herself, as Tom began to shake his head.

"~~My God~~, Pop'd skin you!" Tom said, simply.

"But *listen*. Dion said he'd come along, and the two Pitchers got in, and they were awfully nice. They're both in college at Stanford, and the big one said he had left his banjo at the fraternity house, and that he'd have to miss a train to Del Monte to get it, to-morrow. So we said we'd skim down that way, and he could get it. It was only about sixteen miles, a perfectly straight road.

"Now, Tom, what was the harm in that?" Cecy demanded, pathetically, interrupting herself. "It was bright moonlight, we were two girls, and all the boys were as nice and quiet as they could be. In fact, Dion had gone to sleep. I was sitting in front, with Jim, and he talked to me awfully nicely. There was absolutely *nothing*——"

"Go on," Tom urged her, briefly, as she paused.

"Well, that was all right; they stopped at the fraternity house, and some awfully nice boys came out, and Jim said he was Ethel's brother, and the boys asked us if we would come down to a dance some day—that was all right. So then we came flying back, and we were almost home when the boys said that there was a party at the 'Merry-go-round'——"

"~~My God!~~" Tom commented, in another pause.

"They asked us if we'd just like to go and look on for five minutes, they said all we need have is a lemonade, and watch, from a corner, and see some of the fun. I didn't want to——" Cecy protested, frightened at her brother's face. "But they kept saying that all sorts of people came in from the road, just driving by, and that it was perfectly safe, and that there would be three hundred people there—some of them awfully decent people at that—and the others all wanted to go—they were crazy to go!" Cecy said, fervently.

"You didn't go into the 'Merry-go-round', Cecy?"

"Well, Tom, with all the others!"

"All right, I don't know what happened," Tom said, darkly, "but it was coming to you, whatever it was!"

"Nothing happened!" Cecy answered, sharply, with a touch of youthful dignity. "We sat there for about twenty minutes, and it wasn't much fun, because just some perfectly stupid people who looked like stenographers and school-teachers were dancing around—girls in hats and shirtwaists!—and so we stayed about half an hour, and then came out, and the boys drove us home."

"You got out of it darned cheap, let me tell you!"

"Yes, but here's what was worrying me. While we were there a man came up to us, who knew one of the Pitchers, a fellow named Young, and he was sort of silly and sentimental——"

"Lit?" Tom interpreted, briefly.

"Well, a little. And he told Ethel he knew who she was, and told her her name, and he said to me, 'And I know who you are, too, but I can't remember your name just at the minute!' And he said we had no business there—I guess he was about forty, anyway he's old. So then when we were going, he asked us if we ever read the *Mailbag*, and we said 'Yes.' And he said, 'Well, don't miss this week's copy.' I thought he was just fooling——" Cecy stopped short in distress, her cheeks blazing.

"But yesterday, this evening in fact, Ethel telephoned to know if I would go down to-morrow," she added, uncomfortably. "And I said no, that Mama and Paul would be coming home, and I had to be here, and she said that Jim Hungerford had told her yesterday that this man Young *does* write things for the *Mailbag*, you know the horrible sort of thing, and that he heard that he had put us in it!"

She ended the story abruptly, and sat looking fearfully at her brother.

Tom whistled, his chest rising and falling on a deep sigh. His sister assumed a more and more frightened expression.

"Tom, he won't, will he?"

"I don't know. Gosh, what a mess!" Tom said, and pondered, scowling. "Cheer up, Cecy, if he does, Pop may not see it. And even if he sees it, everyone knows how rotten those weeklies are."

"Oh, but, Tom—— But, Tom—I can't bear it! I shall die," Cecy exclaimed in an agony. "Can't you do something, Tom, can't you telephone and say that Papa will sue them? They *couldn't*—it would be indecent for them to do something that would hurt me so terribly—I'd never live it down, it wouldn't be fair if a newspaper could do that——"

"~~Lord,~~ they don't mind *that!* If they only say what's true, they know they're safe enough," Tom assured her, frowning, and staring into space as he considered the case. "If I were you," he advised, after a long silence during which all Cecy's vague uneasiness and fears had crystallized into actual panic, "if I were you, I'd tell Pop. I'd tell him that you were with these people that Mom lets you visit, and you didn't realize the sort of a place it was——"

"Oh, I can't! Oh, I wish I was dead!" Cecy whispered, deathly pale.

"Le's see, this is Friday," Tom mused. "It won't be in to-morrow's *Mailbag*, that's a cinch. It'll be in a week from Saturday, if he wasn't just bluffing you—which he may have been. I'll tell you what to do, talk to Kate about it. She's got sense. And if she thinks there's a chance in the world, I'll go down to the *Mailbag* office——" His voice dropped, dubiously. Cecy buried her face in her hands.

He left his sister a little later, with no more definite plan outlined. The *Mailbag* was as bold as a rattlesnake, and as dangerous. Eagerly seized by the whitest and most jewelled of the city's hands, eagerly carried into the most perfumed and luxurious of boudoirs, it left behind it weekly a sinister wake of hatred, suffering, spite, and fury. Here all divorces, family fights, scandals, were carefully simmered and seasoned, here innocent names were linked, and contented ignorance turned into suspicion and misery.

Yet it flourished, as does its like in every society in the world,

and Cecilia was afraid of it, as are most women. She spent a sleepless and uncomfortable night, and met her mother and Paul the next day in a mood so gentle and so chastened that Mollie thought her dear little convent girl, untouched by all the feverish society ideals of the Peninsula set, had come back to her.

Everybody had gathered at the house when Mollie came home: Kate and Maggie Walsh, Allie, Mart, Tom, Peter, Cecy, and Ellen. Little Paul was lifted from the car still clinging to Mart's hand, chattering joyously, and when he had been tenderly transferred to the big nursery, every member of the family had a turn at peeping in at him, or coming in to sit beside him. Mollie, bravely smiling, sharing Paul's delight in the transformation of the room that had been turned into a palatial prison for him, caught a glimpse of herself in the big hall mirror; she was getting old. The agony of the child's accident seemed to sweep over her in its full force once more, seeing again these rooms and halls that had been the setting of the terrible scene.

Pete looked old, too, and grave, she thought. It was hard on an adoring father to see this limp, flat little body carried in through the wide halls of the home he had built for his children. Between Kate and Mart, and the plate of ice-cream Allie had carried up to him, the child himself seemed happy enough, his mother thought, torn by a deep sigh, but oh, the difference between to-day's home-coming and that of last summer, of all the happy summers when sunburn and poison-oak and sprained ankles had been the darkest details of the Cunninghams' full holiday history!

Had she ever had him, sturdy and bold and self-reliant? Had it really been Paul who climbed ladders and slipped down in mud, who had come flying into his father's room to scramble upon Peter's big chest in the mornings, riotous in his woolly pajamas, hammering and kicking?

Already the baby roundness had gone for ever from his body, and the baby arrogance from his eyes. Paul had suffered, and the bright smile that so often lighted his white, triangular little face was unearthly sweet because of the hours of pain behind it.

Eight years old, and already "patient," already "meek," under the decisions of the big surgeons. Terrible words, "patient" and "meek," to apply to a child! "If Mart'll jus' hold my hand, like he does," had been Paul's only stipulation, before the last painful examination. And often he said, "I love you, Mom. You're awful kind to me, Pop. Gee, you're all kind to me!"

"How do you think he looks, Peter?" Mollie asked, changing her dress in all the luxury of her own walled, carpeted, curtained room, that seemed quite overwhelming after so many months of pine floors and cold water.

"Grand," Peter answered, heartily. "He's all right. He looks like another child!"

This, considering that his father had seen him but two weeks before, was an overstatement, but it was what Mollie wanted to hear. She smiled at Peter, running her favourite old yellow comb through her thinning hair, and said sympathetically:

"But *you* look tired to-night, Pete; are you tired?"

For answer he glanced at the new copy of the *Mailbag*, folded open and doubled back, and said heavily:

"You may as well know about this, Mollie. Suppose we call Cecy in? It may all be a lie."

So Cecy was summoned, and spent a wretched and tearful half hour facing her father and mother. The article was not scurrilous, after all; it was merely to the effect that at the "Merry-go-round" roadhouse, on Thursday night, two of the prettiest of the débutantes had been demurely enjoying lemonades: E—— M——, escorted by the usually enthusiastic youths, who were indicated, and "the grocer's ambitious daughter, who doesn't seem to care what her brand-new society friends do, as long as she is graciously permitted to be with them."

Some man in the office had drawn Peter's attention to it, and while he was strangely quiet about it, neither Cecilia nor his wife had ever seen him in such a mood, and they were frightened to the deeps of their souls.

"What can he do? What can he do?" Cecy kept asking herself, quaking. Under all her hot shame at the belittling terms

by which she had been identified, was an unreasoning terror of her father.

She answered his brief, harsh questions sullenly. Nothing had happened, she kept telling herself resentfully, so why should he make such a fuss? "Don't *yell* at me," she longed to say, pettishly.

Mollie wept bitterly. Her full, soft face was blotched and soaked with tears. They kept brimming and brimming while she listened, and burst forth in gushes whenever she spoke.

"Don't, Papa—she didn't mean any harm. Oh, Cecy, what could you be thinking of that you'd deceive Papa and me, and get yourself talked about!" faltered Mollie. And once she said: "Bad luck to such dirty-mouthed, lying men that'd publish such things about young girls that wouldn't ever know the badness of the world, and walked into it unbeknownst! 'The grocer's daughter!'"

"As far as *that* goes," Peter commented, darkly, frowning under bushy brows as he walked to and fro, "that's exactly what she is, and if she's ashamed of it, more shame to her. But to have my ger'rl, that was brought up decent and clean among clean and decent people, runnin' after them society people—well, there'll not be any more of it! Cecilia——"

"Papa?" Cecilia quavered, trembling in her big chair, and putting her little handkerchief to her brimming eyes.

"Have you got any more engagements with these precious friends of yours?" Peter demanded.

"Well, Papa—but they're all the friends I *have!*" Cecilia protested, upon a bitter burst of crying. "And if you're going to make me go with horrible common people—well, they're good enough but they're so stupid and *common* they make me sick!—like the Prendergasts and the Cudahys and the Haleys," she sobbed, incoherently, "you might just as well *kill* me!"

"The Haleys and the Cudahys are common, are they?" Peter asked in a measured tone, and with a shrewd look.

"She on'y means they're not in society, Papa!" Mollie interpolated, anxiously.

"I don't think she knows what she means," Peter said, with

a suddenly quieter manner. "Poor child, these wild crazy young boys, wastin' their fathers' money, runnin' their speed cars, have got hold of her, and there's nothin' so silly or wicked she won't admire it in them. I'm not sorry about this," Peter added, glancing at the magazine, "for all it's called me is a grocer, and God knows that's a clean enough job for any man, and if it's showed me that my little ger'rl is as much a fool as all the others, perhaps I ought to thank God for that, too. But we'll have no more of this society talk, Cecy, and if the Cudahys and the Haleys ain't good enough for you, you can sit at home, and say your beads! You tell your mother where you're going to be, every minute of the day and night from now on, and the day you deceive the either of us you'll——"

"Papa dear, don't talk so, she'd never do that!" Mollie pleaded, pitifully.

Cecilia rose to her feet, pale under the youthful freckles, and staring defiantly at her father.

"If Dion Taylor wants me to marry him, I'll marry him in spite of everything you say, and you can't stop me!" she said, her nostrils dilating and her breast heaving. And she left the room with a sharp slam of the door that was echoed, a few seconds later, by a second slam of her own, across the hall.

"Leave her be," Peter said, sadly and tenderly. "She'll come 'round. We can't treat them nowadays as if they were children still. The poor child! She'd put her hands into the pitch, and where'd she find one of that society crowd with soul enough or common decency enough to stand back of her, or pull her out of a hole?"

Mollie went about her interrupted dressing, tearful, frightened, and subdued. Her heart was sick within her. She was hurt and astonished that Dion Taylor evidently had not yet said anything definite to Cecy; there had seemed to be a renewal of all their old intimacy this summer. She was deeply cut, too, in spite of all her honest common sense, by the term "grocer's daughter"; it would surely injure Cecy's chances with all the society crowd, to be so described. Mollie's face burned, thinking that they were all laughing and talking about it to-day.

And from these secondary considerations, and an occasional deep sigh on Paul's account, the original incredible sting of having her little girl's name mentioned in the scandalous columns of the *Mailbag* was a serious blow. Even innocent little Paul's disaster paled before the first touch of anything like shame. Allie would widen horrified eyes at it, Maggie would have a great deal to say, everybody would know it. Mollie did not know where to turn for comfort.

"God bless *that* child, anyway, and make it all right betwixt her and Tom," Mollie thought, as Peter's silent grimness, Cecy's paleness and tears, and the entire family's mystified interest in the suspected scene, opened the evening badly.

It was Kate of whom she spoke, Kate who, with Mart, had improvised a new game for Paul's delectation. It simply consisted of some member of the group entering Paul's room wrapped in a sheet. Paul was allowed three questions and three guesses as to the ghost's identity, and the game for some obscure reason had been already christened, for all time, "Scooby."

When Paul, shuddering with ecstasy, wrongly guessed "Aunt Allie," Allie was "free" and could come in from the hall, where the group was churning about, to watch the other guesses. But when Paul guessed rightly, the ghost became "goofed," and had to lie on the floor without moving, until Paul guessed wrongly again.

Mollie would have thought it improbable, if she had analysed it at all, that anything could make her, or make Peter, laugh to-night. Yet their happiness in the little boy's happiness was too much for any mood of anxiety, depression, or sorrow. He was at home again, and he was making the house ring with mirth.

Kate and Mart were irrepressible. John Kelly came in, and was pressed into service as a ghost, the maids were brought noiselessly up from the kitchen, and as a crowning touch, the old night-watchman, knowing of the afternoon's arrival, and ringing the bell to ask for his little chum, was duly turned into a ghost.

Mollie, freed, and in the big chair near Paul's bed, laughed the tears into her eyes at the sight of Peter, meekly lying on the floor, as a "goof." Tom, doubled up, to deceive his little brother as to stature, and imitating Aunt Allie's "Glory be to the everlasting glory!" was the success of the evening.

Yet the supernumeraries, laughing and breathless, in the upper hall outside the nursery door, had their serious moments.

"Pete's fit to be tied at Cecy!" Allie, divesting herself of the sheet, murmured to Maggie.

"Whatever on earth for?" Maggie, robing Kate for the ordeal, murmured back.

"They say the *Mailbag* had somethin' about her bein' down at a roadhouse with a lot of drunks," Allie supplied, after a hilarious interval. "They had an awful scene in Pete's room just before dinner, him and Cecy and Mollie."

"I noticed Cecy'd been crying," Kate breathed, awed. "For heaven's sake, isn't that awful!"

"Don't say nothing about it. Here, Jawn, it's you! Put your hands up over your head—lissen, don't you want to take that coat off? Kate, put his coat on a chair!"

"He's cute in his shirt-sleeves," Kate thought, receiving the garment from John Kelly. "He's bigger than Tom, if he is an inch shorter."

To Cecy the whole evening was one horror of shame and confusion and anger, and she was glad to crawl into bed, and bury her head, and forget it all in sleep. But the next morning was not much better, her mother was sorrowful and silent, her father cold toward her, and the interest of the remainder of the family in her troubles curious rather than sympathetic.

Deep under the stinging sense of unpopularity was the fear that Dion and his crowd would really go out of her life for ever, and her brief first intoxicating draught of social prominence be her last. She had no real claim on any of them; she *would* have, some day, she determined, with angry tears, but she must await Dion's pleasure, or Ethel's, now. Papa and Mama she could easily coax into permitting her to go to San Mateo again, for just one more trial, but she did not feel half so sure that the

essential invitations would be forthcoming. Dion, as an admirer, was almost as unsatisfactory as Ethel, as a friend.

Ethel was rich, twenty-eight, homely, vivacious, neglected. She did daring things, because nobody paid any attention to her otherwise. She got "crushes" on other girls, and talked them to death, and bored them with her silliness for brief periods, only promptly to forget them. This year she was riding to hounds in breeches, last year reading palms, plunged into the occult; what it would be next year, nobody knew. She really did know everybody in the smartest set, and the friends of her recently divorced and remarried mother were indulgent toward her, but there were few desirable qualifications in Ethel, as a social sponsor, and Cecy experienced some boredness, much distrust, and even moments of actual compunction, when she visited Ethel, and after a few months of her erratic friendship found herself occasionally wishing heartily that she might, in some sweeping fashion, terminate the acquaintance once and for all.

Dion had only to push the matter of their engagement a shade further, and all would be well. Cecy's feeling for him now was not what it had been in the happy beginnings of their affair, almost two years ago. There was no glamour and no thrill about him, no blind trust in her own charms, now. She appreciated perfectly that he was a spoiled, shallow, selfish young fellow, looking always for novelty and amusement, and entirely indifferent to its cost to him or any one else.

But, on the other hand, he and Cecy had come to know each other well. They had many a memory in common, there was a comfortable easiness between them. He had a way of saying: "There'll be the Moores, chaperoning, and you and me, and Arthur and Mary——" thus pairing himself with Cecy, as a matter of course. He usually danced with her a good deal, when opportunity offered, although he made small effort to have her included in the general festivities of his group, and Cecy had to fight a hard fight for every invitation. She hungered for this forbidden life with an actual ache of desire. The spacious upstairs bedrooms where maids assumed charge of

coats, the porches where other maids passed trays of cool drinks, the gossiping, bridge-playing women whose white hands flashed with jewels, who were just home from Europe, just off for Europe, going here for the golf tournament and there for the horse show, poor little Cecy studied and envied them all.

Had her father and mother, the girl thought resentfully, been of a different type; had they built their home in San Mateo, and mingled with this glittering group, as which, Cecy repeated over and over again, they were "every bit as good", then she would have been naturally placed where she so longed to be, one of the lucky girls who flitted about among the big homes and the smart clubs, with everyone friendly, all doors open, any prospect possible.

Indeed, if her mother had been one of the Peninsula set, she might announce her engagement to Dion to-morrow. Sheer force of environment would carry it successfully then. Everyone would expect it, further it, help it into being. On a wave of general laughter and approval it would be carried to the luncheon and engagement-cup stage, and within a few weeks everybody, including Dion, would consider it merely one more fact in a world of facts.

But with Papa and Mama hopeless socially behind her, with nobody to help her, advise her, entertain for her, and with the pretentious big Howard Street house for her setting, Cecy felt overwhelmingly handicapped.

No, she must just go on for a while longer, bearing with Ethel because Ethel offered a door into Dion's world, accepting eagerly such crumbs of other invitations as came her way, forcing herself always to be cheerful and confident, and hoping—hoping—hoping for the moment when in Dion's mind, as well as her own, the vague understanding existing between them should crystallize into something definite.

Sometimes she actually disliked him, for his casual and entirely unintentional cruelties. Sometimes, talking about him to the other girls, she felt a pained sort of love for him well in her heart. Much of the time she did not think of him as a

person at all; he was the objective point of her ambitions, that was all. Her anxiety and fatigue in the pursuit of it had blotted out, for a while, his actual personality and her feeling for him.

"How about lunch at the St. Francis Tuesday?" he would say.

"Love it! One o'clock?"

"One o'clock. I'll see if I can get that Arliss girl—my mother says I ought to do something for her, and she's lots of fun. And I'll get Clark, too."

And the expectations of a little luncheon for two, possibly important, and in any case an advertisement to the world of their close friendship, would be dashed, for Cecy, almost before they were formed.

Once, before her mother's return from the country, he had asked her to dine with him downtown and go to the theatre, "just us, huh?" Cecy had somehow felt that at this affair the vital moment might come. She had duly asked her father, adding calmly that there would be other and older members in the party. Her heart had brimmed with those fresh hopes that each such concrete evidence of Dion's feeling for her aroused, and she had spent the dreamy day that preceded the event itself in a happy world of imagination. If she and Dion became engaged to-night—if, at this time next week, it were really announced, and in the papers—if his mother, now in New York, telegraphed her, and she had a ring—ah, what happiness! What satisfaction, telling Kate and Aunt Maggie and everyone, telling Ethel, who was still unwed, and twenty-eight! How good and busy and contented Cecilia Cunningham would be then!

But at five o'clock her heart had sunk, turned to stone. A letter from Dion had arrived, and two tickets for the hateful show had been enclosed. He was "crazy with headache, too much bachelor party. 'Chuck' Beresford's party," he had written. "Everything off for to-night. Better luck next week."

Cecy had felt arise in her, as she held this communication in her hand, a veritable rage of fury against Dion, her parents, her

life, against her very faith. There was no use in praying, there was no omnipotent power, really, working for people's happiness! She had torn tickets and letter slowly into minute pieces.

"I'd like to know why *I'm* always the one to be humiliated, to be snubbed?" she had said aloud, in a hard, slow voice. "I'd like to know if Dion Taylor is any better than I am, if it's fair that he can do this sort of thing, and I can't do *anything?*"

After the episode of the roadhouse and the *Mailbag*, she sank into a sort of apathy, darkly unwilling to make herself agreeable in the contemptible stupidness of the family circle, and unable to escape from it. She telephoned Ethel twice, but Ethel seemed absorbed in other things, and she dared not telephone Dion for fear of bringing her father's fury down upon her head.

Cecy spent days idling, reading, loitering over to the Library to talk with Kate, ready to burst into tears at her mother's mildest reproof, and assuming a martyred air when asked to perform the slightest domestic service.

She read to Paul lifelessly. "How long did you want me to read, Mama?" She declined Aunt Allie's invitation to accompany her to Advent services at the convent.

"You used to be so fond of the nuns, Cecy," Aunt Allie would say. "And they're always askin' after you."

"They always do that, about all the old girls."

"No, but Sister Aloysius certainly is very fond of you."

"Sister Aloysius is Mistress of Novices, that's why *she* always pretends to be so fond of girls."

"Cecilia, I won't allow that you should talk so silly about women that gives their lives and all to God!"

"I'm sorry, Mama." And Cecy would push up her firm little lower jaw under her red lip, half shut her eyes, and fix her bored and stubborn gaze patiently upon space.

So Christmas came again, and again Mollie looked back at the last Christmas, and could not believe that she had had anything about which really to feel worried then. To be sure she had been anxious that Cecy's affair with Dion would proceed to the natural termination, but Tom had been home from Paris, affectionate and amusing, and Cecy had been going to the

Taylors' New Year's party, after all. And Paul had had his velocipede, and had ridden up and down the drive tirelessly, in his new little dark blue coat with the beaver collar and beaver cap, the strong little legs churning like a little walking-beam. Paul——! Lying flat to-day, with Martin's gruff voice reading "Toomai" to him in an incoherent jumble.

But the Christmas tree came, swathed and slim, and was set up in Paul's big room, and Allie brought the boxes of old trimmings down from the store closet, and Ellen brought the big square boxes of new ones up from the basement, and Kate arrived, glowing and excited, and flowers and wreaths and telegrams began to come, and the turkey came.

Outside there was a windy cold rain, but airs deliciously warmed by the roaring fires, and deliciously chilled by the opening door, began to drift about, scented by pine, and baking bread, and violets. Surprises abounded behind every closed door. Scent spread itself from Ellen's litter of tissue-paper and sachet; Mollie put an apron over her old blue silk and gesticulated with a scissors; Allie propped a fist on her hip, sniffled with an upward jerk of her long nose, debated, and considered. Peter came in at half-past three, and his wife kissed him, and Ellen sprang into his arms and strangled him. Ellen had seen something strangely resembling a bicycle in shape, disguised under a sheet, in the back hall closet.

"Have you got the castor-oil and carpet tacks for Ellen's stockin'?" Peter asked, as he had asked for twenty happy Christmases of one stocking or another. And Ellen strangled him again.

"I've got too much for Paul," Mollie said, as she had always said. "I don't know that it's right—with so many poor this Christmas, and all. But the Foleys sent a crate would knock you down this year, and wait until you see what the Doyles sent!"

And Ellen and Paul shouted with anticipatory joy.

"Where's Tom?" Mollie asked then.

"Him and Jawn had to go uptown, they'll be out in no time," Peter answered. And if Mollie's heart might be said

to have begun to hum contentedly at the statement, surely the heart of Kate Walsh, as she threaded tinsel balls with new wires, and clipped and measured, burst into song. She had seen John two nights ago, in a hilarious Orpheum party, with the Cudahys and Tom and Cecy. But somehow in the riot he had found time to say:

"Kate, when'll I see you again? There was something I wanted to say to you."

"Oh?" She had raised her beautiful dark brows interestedly. "Can't say it now?"

"Not very well I can't. It's something——" He had cleared his throat. "Something I hope won't make any difference between us, no matter what you think of it——"

Bursts of sunshine, sparkles and stars, spring perfumes of grass and lilacs and the rising strains of heavenly voices singing together had all taken possession of dingy O'Farrell Street, and had confused Kate as she answered:

"Aren't you going to be out at Aunt Mollie's Christmas Eve, to help trim the tree? We'll all be there."

"Well, yes, I guess I am," John had answered. And this was Christmas Eve, and John was coming. Into the cream and apricot of Kate's cheek a deep dimple pressed itself, and her blue eyes, turned toward Paul, toward her uncle, toward the bored and drooping Cecy, shone with a sort of liquid light.

Christmas Eve, and Peter and Mollie ready to thank God that the dear baby was spared to them, anyway, that Cecy had gotten into no lasting mischief, anyway, that Tom was home again, anyway, and the comfort and delight of his father in the old firm! Christmas was Christmas, a time of home happiness and gratitude, after all.

And only a short mile away, in a little apartment house on Gough Street, Tom had just entered, with a strangely grim and ashen face, the familiar little parlour, and Babette, dishevelled and panting, was holding his hands.

"Tell me about it, I don't get it!" Tom was saying.

And Babette, giving him the letter that had fluttered to the floor, was saying:

"Read it. It's from my husband's—attorneys. Germaine —you know she left me, she was very impudent and I discharged her Sunday—went right to my husband. He's going to file a counter-suit for divorce, he's going to fight for my baby, for Jean! Tom, Tom, if he gets her, if anything harms her or touches her, I'll kill myself! Read it, Tom. My husband's found out about you and me, and he threatens to name you as co-respondent!"

Tom, hardly sensing it, picked up the sheet with its neat legal heading. Furth & Hildebrand, speaking for their client, Mr. Max Newman, desired to inform Mrs. Babette Newman that Mr. Newman, dissatisfied with the arrangements made for the complete custody of the child by her mother, would be glad to negotiate with Mrs. Newman's lawyer regarding a more reasonable adjustment. Mr. Newman, on the testimony of Germaine Pinés, lately in Mrs. Newman's employ, would feel justified, in the event of Mrs. Newman's not acceding to his reasonable demands regarding his daughter, in taking immediate steps to file a counter-suit for divorce, evincing Mrs. Newman's friendship for Thomas J. Cunningham as grounds to prove her unfitness for guardianship of the child.

Tom read it twice, was still unable to sense it. Babette was staring at him, fearfully, expectantly.

"*Now* what?" she asked.

CHAPTER XVI

"NOW what?" Tom echoed, a resentful flush staining his hard young Irish face, and a resentful glitter in his blue Irish eyes. "Why, now—now," he repeated, fighting for time, "we'll get married, that's all!" he ended, in relief. "We'll get married right away—the day you get your divorce. That'll end *that!*"

Babette was all at sea. She stared at him confusedly, took the official-looking letter from his hand, looked at it quite without seeing it, and looked blankly at him again.

"What will our getting married have to do with it?" she demanded, sitting down limply, without removing her gaze from his face.

"Well——" Tom began, on a great confident breath. "Well, he won't go on with it, once we're married," he asserted, a little vaguely.

"Why not?" Babette demanded, fearfully.

"Well——" He was still tremendously buoyant in manner but somewhat uncertain in speech. "You know he doesn't really want Jean," Tom offered.

"No," Babette said, struck. "That's true. He doesn't. He wants *me*."

"Exactly!" Tom said, triumphantly, relieved to see her own relief.

"He didn't want her when she was a baby—leaving us both to play poker all night!" Babette, musing aloud, said darkly. "Imagine, one night, when she was really quite ill——"

Tom winced interiorly. He hated the details. Her defence of herself, involving intimate revelations of all sorts, invariably offended some instinct of delicacy and dignity deep within him.

"I took the baby and went straight over to Papa!" she now finished her story. "And I was right."

Of course she had been right, poor little bewildered, ill-treated creature. But Tom did not like to think of her as boxed up here in this identical apartment with Max Newman, trailing about in delicate morning gowns on Sunday mornings, nursing her baby with this offensive, coarse cad looking on, quarrelling—— "We got so that every word was a quarrel," she had told him, innocently, more than once.

Christmas horns sounded in the grey quiet of the street; a dense, cold wet fog was moving in a steady wall from the ocean, it boomed softly against the houses like a tangible thing. In the little room was order, warmth, all the delicate beauty of Babette's pretty furnishings: chintzes, rugs, lamps, large dim photographs of her friends.

"You know, Tom," the woman said with sudden force, getting to her feet, and walking a few restless steps, while her fingers pushed her dark hair away from the white forehead, "he'll never get her! Max Newman will never get my baby—he can be sure of that! I'd start to-morrow—I'd start to-night—for Paris, anywhere—I'd travel for ten years! But he'll never get her, he can make up his mind to that right *now!*"

"This is Thursday," Tom mused, scowling. "When could he file a suit?"

She sat down, restless, and breathing hard in her fright.

"Not to-morrow—that's Christmas. He might Saturday, I suppose."

"Saturday. But he probably wouldn't," Tom suggested, thinking it out; "if you intimated that you would be reasonable——"

"Reasonable! If that means that he is to have anything to say about Jean," Babette exclaimed, instantly firing, "I certainly will not be reasonable!"

"I said if you intimated——" Tom repeated, with a faint accent on the last word.

She looked at him sharply, comprehending, nodded her head and narrowed her eyes.

"You mean——?"

"I mean that you get your final decree of divorce on Tuesday."

"I see——" Babette said, slowly. "If I could keep him from acting until after Tuesday—— But he's smart," she broke off, suddenly, "he'll think of that!"

"Once you are absolutely free," Tom pursued, "I don't see what he could do. On Wednesday you and I will get married —on Tuesday evening, for that matter. Once you are my wife, I don't see that he can do anything."

Babette pondered, her dark brows drawn.

"Less than a week!" she said, in a whisper.

"Less than a week! We'll be married late Tuesday afternoon, and drive down to Carmel that night——"

"Jean?" she interrupted, anxiously, looking up.

"Jean with us, of course!"

"Five days—I ought to be able to get through five days," Babette said, restively. "But they make me so *nervous!* I'm just shaking all over—afraid of my own shadow——"

"I don't see why," Tom reassured her, sensibly. "You go to your mother to-night, stay there quietly, don't commit yourself to anything, just listen—seem to agree——"

"Oh, listen!" she repeated, despairingly. "You don't *know* how they worry me! My mother, my aunts—they're always telling me how Max has reformed, how much money he's making, how he's gone into a tobacco trust or syndicate or something, and what a good man he's come to be! They make me so *nervous!*" she said again.

"Well, can you stand it until Tuesday?" the man asked, practically. "Then come quietly into town with Jean, go to court and get your decree, meet me somewhere——"

"The point is," Babette, who had not been listening, interrupted, "what's best for Jean. The Court gave me Jean when I divorced Max—a year ago. I can't see how the Court can go back on its own decision!"

"Thanks to that French girl——" Tom began, bitterly, and

stopped with a significant glance. Babette, meeting his eye, flushed.

She was sitting in a low chair, now she bent forward with her elbows on her knees, and buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, what a fool—what a fool I was!" she whispered. "What a—devil she must be! Her cousin, you know," Babette added, irrelevantly, looking up with dry eyes, "is my Aunt Bertha's cook. They've probably been watching us—spying——"

"Our only way out is to get married immediately, then they'll all lose interest in us," Tom argued.

"I suppose so." She sighed deeply. "If you only knew how hard they make it for me!" she said.

"Are they so fond of him?" Tom asked, jealously.

"Oh," she answered, impatiently, "I don't know what they want! They like family life—they hate breaks—anything for peace! Mama used to dislike Max, and Papa, too. But he's my husband, and they think I ought to go back to him—that's all."

"They'll have absolutely nothing to do with your affairs this time next week," Tom reminded her. "I wouldn't say anything to your father and mother about the counter-suit, anyway. The holidays come in here, all you have to do is lie low, don't answer that letter, come quietly to town on Tuesday, get your divorce, you and I can get our license and be married that same afternoon! Just keep your courage up for another five days."

"Five days aren't long!" Babette said with a little tremulous laugh. And they fell to talking of the trip south, on New Year's Eve. Tom would telegraph the little hotel at Carmel. Jean and Babette, "my girls," he said, with tears standing in his Irish blue eyes, must have their heavy coats. Meanwhile, he must be looking up a small apartment of which they might take possession when, after a week of wandering, they came back. And if he couldn't find one they could go to the Hotel Fairmont for a while. "Can you imagine the rest—the *relief*—you are going to feel, when you get into the car, and tuck the robe around you,

and hold Jean in your lap, and we start off down the Peninsula?" he asked her, admiring the bright colour stain her thoughtful face, and her scarlet lips twitch with a smile in spite of herself.

"Tommy, just you and I and Jean, having a little supper and a fire, all to ourselves——!"

"And listening to the sea, and smelling the pines, and together —always to be together! Nobody's business what we do or where we go, lunches by the roadside, tramps over the hills in Marin County——"

"Ah, I've never had a chum!" she cried, longingly. And for a moment they were silent.

"Frightened any more, my sweetheart?"

"Oh, no. Max can't hurt us—I see that now. But getting that horribly businesslike looking document scared me almost to death. And I was all alone!"

"I'm obliged to Max," Tom said, whimsically. "Thanks to him everything will be hurried up several months. This time next month it will all be settled, and everybody will take it calmly for granted."

"Isn't it a comfort to think that! Babette Cunningham——" the woman mused, softly. "It's pretty, isn't it?"

"Mamma," said little Jean, from the doorway, in her pretty baby French, "am I to take Chou-chou to Grandmother's house?"

Babette and Tom had straightened suddenly, and now Babette went to kneel down before the lovely little creature in her picturesque brief velvet frock, and put her arms about her.

"Yes, my darling," she said, tenderly. "That's her new puppy that was sent her—from someone—for Christmas!" she explained, with a significant glance at Tom, over her shoulder.

"From my father!" Jean supplied, surprised at the omission.

"It came while I was downtown, trying to see my lawyer," Babette said. "And the new maid accepted it as a matter of course. It's a sweet, sweet puppy," she added, to satisfy Jean, who looked reproachful at her tone, "and we're going to take it over to Grandfather's. And that reminds me," she added, getting to her feet, "that we must pack, if I'm going to my

mother's. And under the circumstances I think it is the only thing to do. So I won't see you to-morrow, and don't try to see me——"

"But what about an engagement with me a week from to-day?" the man asked, trying to tease her into something like her usual calm.

"Ah, well, of course!" she said with a quick, unhappy smile. "But now, I must get to my mother and father," she added, nervously. "I tried to see Mr. Meyers, my lawyer, to-day, but he wasn't at the office. However, I got him at his daughter's house, and gave him some idea of the situation, and he advised me to go to Mother at once. And he's crossing on the five-fifteen, too; he lives in San Rafael, so I'm to meet him, and we'll talk on the boat. I'm—I'm so nervous about her," Babette added, with a glance toward the bedroom door, where Jean had disappeared, "that every minute here is an agony to me. Once I'm at home with my father and brothers, I don't see that Max could do anything. But I think of her—she's such a quiet, loving little thing!—and of my packing her dear little wrapper and slippers and things to go to Aunt Bertha's, and of how Max would spoil her and wean her away from me! And Aunt Bertha has always said that I was too soft with her. She'd make her answer, and say 'please' and 'thank you,' and my darling would hang her little head, and begin to cry, and wonder where her mother was——"

"Now, now——" Tom said, soothingly.

"Oh, I know—I'm just silly! But it frightened me so——" She put her arms about his neck, raised her face. "You're so big and so comforting, Tom," she said.

And it was with the grateful little phrase and the memory of her kiss singing in his heart like the clapper in a bell that Tom went out into the drizzling quiet of the winter street, and turned, with a great wrenching sigh that seemed to affect soul and body, toward the Christmas tree, the noise and gaiety and confusion of his father's home.

A week from to-night, a week from to-night, he would have his fragrant, loving, grave-eyed little wife safe in his arms; little

Jean asleep in the next room, and the light of the dying wood fire falling upon the simple plastered walls with their crossbeams of blue-gray eucalyptus wood. And outside the rustling of the pines, and the rhythmic crash and fall of the Pacific on the great rocks below the cliffs.

It was almost midnight when the Cunninghams' big Christmas tree was trimmed, and all the mysterious boxes and packages, little and big, heaped at its foot. Tom, in wild spirits, happier indeed than his mother could remember his being for months before, had carried away armful after armful of papers and cardboard boxes, and had finally undertaken the adjustment of the strings of electric lights.

Every separate member of the family, except the imprisoned little Paul, who was a sort of royal audience of one for all this display, had dragged forth from hiding places all sorts of plunder, and whispered, giggled, shrieked.

"I've got a horrible thing for you, Aunt Allie. I wanted something, and then I couldn't get what I wanted, and so I took what I could get—oh, wait! I have something else for you, too. That helps."

"Now, listen, Mollie, this may not be what you want, when you open it to-morrow, and if it isn't he said you could change it for any colour——"

"Well, when you talk like that if I'm not dying to see it!"

"I'll bet you did see it!"

"No, I didn't—not a thread."

"Mama, I made mine for you, and it's perfectly horrid! Cecy said she'd get me a thing it needed and then she got the wrong thing——"

"It wasn't my fault they didn't have that kind of—you know—any more, Ellen!"

"It'll be lovely, darling. I know I'll love it, that my own girl made me with her own hands!"

"Papa, you know last year you gave all of us bottles of cologne; are you going to give us the same things this year?"

"Never you mind what I'm giving you this year."

"If I guess it will you tell me?"

"Say, we'll need an addition built onto this house, Pop, if much more comes in for Paul. Looky here, this is for the rest of us, and this here, under both these sheets, is all his! He won't be opening packages all day and all night—oh, *no!*"

"Allie, did you use up all the silver thread——? Told you not to give the Baby that, Mart, and now look what you done! A lot of tinselly glass under him, cutting him to pieces! Hold him up there, Papa, till we smooth it off the sheet——"

"Mart'll hold me!" Paul said, jealously. And the little pipe-stem arms—so thin now!—and the pale little triangular face were pressed close to the ruddy, dirty, tousled glow of the adored brother's splendid health and strength.

"Are you a dirty little liar?" Martin asked, kissing his ear in puppy fashion.

"Yes!" Paul agreed, ecstatically.

"Are you just about good for nothin' on earth?"

"Yes!"

"Are you the sort of rubbish they sweep out of stables and burn?"

"Mart, *don't* ask him horrid things like that! A body'd think you were crazy, and shut you up in a madhouse!" But Mollie's voice was rich with affection and amusement, as her big, clumsy eighteen-year-old tenderly lowered the wrecked little form back among the shaken pillows.

"Miss Walsh, if you could kindly keep your big hulk off me—— A man was killed in Stanislaus County by having a woman your size fall on him!"

"I do beg your pardon, Tom!" Kate, stumbling against him, was in a gale of laughter as sweet as that of a shaken baby.

"That's right, put your foot in it now! You're a dandy, allow me to be among the first to congratulate you on *that!*"

"Oh, heavens! I've broken the whole thing!"

"Heavenly day, Pete! There go the lights——"

"It's only a short circuit. I'll fix it, if someone will kindly bind Miss Catherine Walsh over meanwhile to keep the peace. It's only this side of the room, Mom——"

"Wouldn't you know, on Christmas Eve——"

"Give me the candles every time," Allie's voice droned in a sort of melancholy triumph.

"Them little electric lights looks very artificial entirely on anybody's Christmas tree; they have an awful Produstant look to them," said the grandmother's sweet, cracked old voice dispassionately. "Little pink and red candles look good, and the Infant Himself hadn't no electric lights, and Him in an ould stable itself——"

"Ah-h-h!" said a dozen voices, as the darkened half of the room flashed into brightness again.

"You're very quiet, Jawn; didn't your dinner set good on you?" Mrs. Cunningham asked, in motherly concern. Over John's handsome dark face a smile radiant in its utter content shone suddenly as he said:

"Too happy, maybe."

Nobody else noticed anything, but Catherine Walsh, standing erect and sweet and busy, with both her arms raised to a high branch of the big tree, sent him a glance from her brilliantly shining blue eyes. After a few minutes he found some employment in her immediate neighbourhood, and they murmured together.

"I'm afraid every minute that I'll give myself away!" Kate breathed, twisting a wire.

"Oh, Kate, can't we tell them! I'll burst if we don't."

"Oh, not yet! I'm all turned 'round, I don't know what to think, myself, yet—much less have them all buzzing!"

"Do you know what I'm afraid of?" He was serious; the olive face was darkened in a very agony of dread, and the sweat came out on his big square hands. "I'm afraid you'll die," he said, choking, and not looking at her, as he draped a string of tiny glass balls in a prettier loop.

"Oh, I love you for that——!" He was to hear the amused, loving, maternal note in the rich voice many times again, many hundreds of times. But he had never heard it before, and a little chill of love's fear, love's agony, swept over him.

"You're so beautiful—I love you so——" he said, trembling.

And he had one full look into the glorious blue eyes before an imperious summons called her away.

At half-past eleven the room was all in order, and the tree twinkled at a thousand points in the tempered dark. Martin was left with Paul, and everyone else went off to the Midnight Mass.

It was cold in the streets, but the big church was warm, and pine-scented, and packed with devout hundreds, and organ music was straining sweetly through the candle-lighted great spaces under the lofty roof.

"Oh, holy night, the stars are brightly shining——"

"That's Doctor Stan Richards singin'," Maggie whispered raucously to Allie. "Hasn't he got the grand voice?"

Cecy, kneeling beside her mother, buried her face in her hands. Life bored her; the horrible fact of being bored on Christmas Eve had befallen her! She was disgraced, she would never be the family angel, the spotless little example that was to be held before Ellen again. They had forgiven her the *Mailbag* episode, but life would never, never be the same! Cecy tried to pray, fell into a dream in which the Taylors lost all their money, and was vaguely consoled by the thought of Dion coming humbly to Papa for a job.

Ellen prayed for a wrist-watch, and that Paul would "getwell." Mollie prayed fervently for them all; Tom was kneeling there dutifully enough, and all the neighbouring pews had reason to see that the eldest Cunningham boy was with the family at early Mass. But Tom was not exactly devout—— Mollie redoubled her prayers.

John Kelly knelt straight and thoughtful in the pew just before her, and next him Grandma, blinking suspiciously at the altar, as if she suspected that the rather youthful celebrant had violently deposed the feeble old Vicar, who was his assistant. And beside Grandma was Robbie's dear Kate, slender and lovely, her crown of loosened chestnut curls spraying up against the old beaver hat that had been Cecy's, her face buried in her

hands. Was the child crying? Well, she had a hard life, poor Kate!

Kate was crying. But they were happy tears.

"Oh, my God, make me grateful! Oh, my God, I thank Thee!" ran Kate's prayer. "Make me a good wife to him—forgive me all the impatience and badness—when I thought I'd never have what other girls have! Oh, God, bless us both! Don't take him away from me!" She drifted into half-forgotten prayers. "Oh, my God, I love Thee with all my heart—oh, my God, I thank Thee that Thou hast vouchsafed——"

She sat back. Her eyes met John's, behind the chenille and bead decorated cape her grandmother had worn to church for twenty years. A solemn joy irradiated both their faces. John's full heart, his satisfied and yet hungry soul went no further than the hour that would give her to him, slender, young, good, loving, his wife.

Kate saw further, saw wriggling little boys in this pew or some other pew, a good little girl, in a poke bonnet, next to Mother. Herself flying home. "Did he wake up, Mary? Did he have his bottle?" The Kellys.

They all came out into the dark, as the city rang with the circling notes of bells, overlapping each other, brimming up to the cold, winking stars. "Merry Christmas! How's your mother to-day?" said voices, on the long flight of stone steps. "Merry Christmas to you all! Well—is it you, Mis' Lacey? Hello, Frank——"

"Merry Christmas, Kate," said John Kelly. Their hands met under cover of gloom and confusion.

"Merry Christmas, dear!" she said.

CHAPTER XVII

ON CHRISTMAS DAY Tom broke the news of his engagement, and his imminent marriage, to his father and mother.

It was after the hearty two o'clock dinner; the Walshes had gone home. Paul, exhausted with inconceivable felicity, was sound asleep; Ellen was murmuring in her own room with a small friend, who was to wait until Baby awakened, and get something from the Cunninghams' tree. Cecilia, from utter listlessness, had accompanied Aunt Allie to some convent festivity, and Martin was out in the garage, experimenting, under several binding conditions, with the superb new car that had been Peter's gift to his wife. The old car, to use or trade or sell, had been his parents' Christmas gift to Tom.

"He and Kate'll have need of it, God willing," Peter had said.

Tom spoke of the car first, when he came into the big bedroom that had been his mother's for the twenty years of the house's existence. Some of the younger children had been born in this room, and Daisy had died here, on a Christmas Day thirteen years before. Daisy would have been sixteen now.

Tom remembered the little table of medicines and glasses beside the big bed, and that his father had slept upstairs with him while Daisy was ill. Ellen had been the baby then, and such a bad, sickly baby! He remembered the hush upon the house when Daisy died, and himself and Cecilia creeping in to look at the waxen stillness of the tiny face; his mother had been kneeling beside, but not touching, the bed, and Aunt Allie whispering to her.

"Oo—oo—oo, I don't care—don't ask me!" his mother had

moaned, not moving even her eyes. But Aunt Allie had whispered again: "I think the little white shoes, Mollie, and the French dress she liked so much—the little angel——"

To-day Mollie, dressed only in a short kimono and her sturdy alpaca "balmoral," was lying flat on the bed. Peter, in his shirtsleeves and socks, was sprawled comfortably on the couch that ran at an angle from the direction of the bay window to that of the foot of the bed.

"Pop," began Tom, as they both smiled wearily at him and Peter let the sheets of his newspaper slide to the floor. "That car of yours—of mine, ahem!—is going to come in very handy for me."

Still they smiled sleepily, lovingly. He nerved himself as might a man who picks up a pistol.

"I want to tell you and Mom something, Pop," Tom said. "And first of all I want to tell you that there was a reason for my not mentioning it before this. I'll come to that later. But this is it—I'm in love, I'm engaged, and I want to get married!"

Peter brought his feet to the ground, sat up, his bright little blue eyes on his son.

"Well—no harm in that," he said, slowly, wetting his lips, and with a glance at his wife.

Mollie sat up too, left the bed, walked toward Tom, and sat down in a chair.

"Is it Kate?" she asked, with the room going round her, and her own voice sounding strange.

"Kate!" He was honestly astonished. "No, it's not Kate," Tom said, delighted in spite of various doubts and qualms, to be so far on the hard road. "No, her name is Babette—Babette Newman. She's a very lovely, sweet, good woman I met in Paris. But she's here now, in fact she's a San Francisco girl."

"What—what—what's her name?" Peter asked, vaguely. He was too utterly astonished, he had been taken too entirely at a disadvantage to think or care what he was asking.

Mollie regarded her first-born in stupefaction. What on earth was the child talking about? A—a girl—engaged—her Tom——

"Why wouldn't you tell us?" she asked.

"Well, Mom, there were good reasons. In the first place, she's a very quiet little thing, and then—then, in a way!——"

"You fell in love with her in Paris?" asked his father, in the tone of one who goes to the roots of matters.

"No. Well, I guess I did, but I never told her there. She and the little girl—she has a little girl seven years old—came home after I did."

"She—has a little girl?" Mollie muttered, staring at him.

"Jean. Yes."

"She's a widow, then?"

"She's worse than widowed." Tom had hoped for some sympathy here; but both the simple, middle-aged faces staring at him were devoid of any expression except a sort of horror and fear.

"Divorced, eh?" Peter asked, heavily. And there was a silence. Peter looked at his son, dully, dazedly. Tom looked down at his own big linked hands with a sulky expression. Mollie put the back of one cushiony hand against her mouth, and began to whimper, her terrified eyes looking from one man to the other.

"Well, tell us about it, my boy," Peter commanded then, in a quiet, measured tone. "You met this lady in Paris. Where's the husband?"

"He's here—in town. I know you'll feel badly about this at first," Tom interrupted himself, in a sort of burst, "but, Pop, when you know her——"

"Go on," Peter said, briefly, with a backward jerk of his bull-like head. "Is she a Catholic?"

"She's a Jewess. Her uncle is a rabbi."

It was said. They knew the worst now. The storm could only break over him. Tom mentally bowed his head to it, and felt some spiritual emotion corresponding to the closing of eyes.

"Oh, no—no—no!" Mollie moaned in the silence. "Oh, my God!"

"It sounds terrible to you, I know," Tom began. He had rehearsed this argument mentally a thousand times. His words came more and more smoothly. "But isn't a lot of it in your

own minds?" he went on, trembling but persuasive. "Here is a sweet good girl, devoted to her family and her child, full of goodness and cleverness, and because a fusty lot of old grannies say so, she isn't ever to know what happiness and companionship are again, not if she lives to be ninety! Don't you think yourselves that it's rot? I know what Aunt Allie and Grandma will say—and I don't care! But surely you and Mama won't be bound by that! Babette and I will live our own lives, she's musical, we like the same books and the same plays——"

"You blayguard," Peter said, in a terrible and menacing voice, as he paused, "leave the women of your own family out of this!"

Tom's face, warmed by his own eloquence, darkened, became sullen.

"Oh, certainly, sir!" he answered, bitterly, and was still.

The scene that followed was the most frightful in Mollie's life, perhaps the most terrible in any of their lives. It began with Peter, whose face was dark with congested blood, and whose voice shook with fury, walking up and down, turning with a switch of his stockily built body at the end of each dozen paces, and pouring out upon his son a river of such stinging contempt as Tom had never dreamed him capable of feeling, much less expressing.

Mollie, from a frozen agony of silence, was goaded to protests, little incoherent moans: "Don't call him that—it's Tom, Papa. Tom, for God's sake don't speak that way to your father!"

"You dare to come in here, into your mother's presence, and tell us that everything we done for you in the twenty-five years since you were born is thrown away on you!" Peter said, in the course of his attack. "For months you been coming in here, with your mother and sisters, and makin' love on the sly to this woman who's another man's wife, and the mother of his child! I don't know what her idea of morality is, and I don't care——"

"Be careful what you say about her," Tom interrupted, in a quiet tone, and without leaving his chair, but at white heat. "Or—father or no father, I'll knock you down for insulting a woman as pure as my mother——"

"You poor fool—you poor fool—they had to get you like all the rest of the poor asses that hasn't sense enough to keep in the road!" Peter muttered, pacing madly, and with a heaving chest. "My God, he walks in here, full of the good food his father's kept him full of since he left his mother's breast——"

"Papa," Mollie pleaded, her teeth chattering, her full, soft face ashen.

"And he's goin' to be married in a few days, if you please, so that the husband can't make trouble—all right, all right! But get out of my house," Peter finished, in a quiet, almost casual voice. "You spit on your mother and your faith and your immortal soul that'll be judged before you're cold in your shroud, and I'll spit on you. You get out of my house, and don't show your grinning face here——"

"Peter, it's Tom, dear!" Mollie was crying bitterly, trying to keep pace with him as he walked up and down. "Don't talk so wild, darlin' heart," she pleaded, with the tears running down her face. "Forgive him, Papa, leave us talk it over calmly, like we always done, when it was somethin' for the children! Don't send him out on Christmas night, dear, the little boy I all but give my life and was anointed for, and him screamin' his little heart out when they thought the both of us was dead! Peter, for God's sake, dear——"

"Don't, Mollie," Peter said, gently. He put her back in her chair, giving her a worried look before he walked up to his son. Tom was standing now, he was taller than his father, and he looked like a young animal, insensate with anger, blindly facing another one. His black hair was tossed in confusion, rumpled when he had buried his head in his hands, under his father's tirade, and his face was white.

"Go back to her, and tell her you've no mother and no father, no faith, no home, and no job, and see what she says!" Peter commanded his son, doggedly.

"You don't think I'm afraid to work for my wife, as you did?" Tom asked, shaking and scornful. "I'll gladly go—and when you send for me, for my mother's sake," he added, with a boyish sob in his beautiful, hurt young voice, "I'll come back. But

so help me God I'll never speak to you again, you —— that can make your religion, and the fact that you happen to be my father, your excuse for knifing me, now that I'm down, and need you!"

"Tom," whispered his mother, clutching him desperately, "my darling, my first one, that I prayed for every day since he was born, don't leave me like this, dear! Don't do it, Tom. Wait, lovey. Peter, make him wait—— Leave us talk about it. Why, we'll all be laughin' about it in a few minutes," sobbed Mollie, her mouth twisting and wet with tears. "Look, dear, I'm smilin' now—— Mama's not worried about it, it'll all come right! Peter, if ever I ast you anything in the twenty-six years since you and me stood up in Saint Mary's——"

"He can take his pick betwixt us." Peter, shaking off her hand, avoiding her eye, said grimly. "The day he goes to that woman he stops bein' my son!"

"Don't worry. I'll go!" Tom said. He was destined, for a long, long time, to hear the bitter wail that escaped his mother.

But she did not speak again. Tom slammed the door behind him, and there was the silence of death in the room.

Death had been here, too, not many years before. Mollie remembered it, remembered putting away the little bowl in which chopped ice had been kept, the glass from which Daisy had drunk, the woolly white bear. She remembered the suffocation, the iron heaviness of that hour.

But this hour was harder.

She sat still, while the clock ticked and embers broke in the coal fire. Slowly the noise of loud, angry voices died out of the air. Peter breathed in heavy snorting breaths; through the closed doors they could hear the faint, gallant strains of the Victrola—Paul's Christmas Victrola; he must be awake.

In Mollie's windows big evergreen wreaths had been hung; Tom had helped the girls hang them there. Tom!

Ellen rattled the knob, put in an inquisitive head.

"Rita likes the purse and the handkerchiefs, too, Mama. Can I give her both of them? Mama, Tom's upstairs packing—why is he?"

"Never mind run along yes give her both," Mollie said, in a gentle, dead tone, without punctuation.

Peter, dishevelled, grey, still red in the face, looked timidly at his wife.

"Maybe if you went up and reasoned with him, Mama?" he asked, in an exhausted voice.

"He'd never listen to me," Mollie answered, weeping afresh.

"Put it to him that he'd much better stay here, and think twict about it," Peter panted, troubled.

"Papa, maybe if you would——?"

"I would not," said Peter Cunningham, grimly.

"He was never one to be drove, like you can drive Mart," Mollie hinted, in the sulphurous silence.

"She's got him on time," Peter mused, out of a deep study. "That's where she's got him. I wouldn't wonder had they it all framed up on the headstrong child. No time to ponder it. No, my lady'll rush him through—that's the way they get them!"

"Maybe if he'd stay home, and think about it, and reason it out within himself, for he's always been a good biddable child," Mollie, who always gave her children such qualities as chanced to fit her argument, said, innocently, forgetting her last remark. "He's one would always be said by you and me, while another would have the heart scalded out of us! I can't believe he'd marry with a poor creature that'd cost him his faith, and forty years old, I don't doubt——"

"Of course he won't! It's all a storm in a teapot," Peter said, as her voice died forlornly to silence, in a sudden loud tone of relief that poured subtle reassurance into his wife's aching heart. "Why, how can he marry her; he hasn't a cent in the world! Maybe she's just amusin' herself with him while she's waitin' for some rich feller! He has a right to be mad, the way I talked to him, but nothin'll come of the whole thing but talk!"

"But if he might love her?" Mollie offered, fearfully.

"Love?" echoed his father, scornfully. "He don't know what love is! You go upstairs to him, Mollie, and tell him to come to his senses, and that he'll have to have some rhyme

and reason in the whole matter before he talks to me about it again!"

Mollie, after a dubious interval, padded duly upstairs, to find Tom grim, white-faced, and packing two ostentatiously displayed suitcases. He was not, however, packing them as rapidly as he might have done, and if Mollie's heart was enormously reassured by finding him still here under the family roof-tree at all, it was no less a relief to Tom to realize that he was not to be allowed to go without protest.

Mollie sat down in a big armchair with a deep sigh, panting for breath as she always did when she climbed a flight of stairs, and the conversation began with a note of timid and loving reproof on her side and cold haughtiness on that of Tom.

But Tom had been thinking deeply in the past twenty minutes, and had angrily and reluctantly come to the conclusion that he would gain nothing by a dramatic display of indignation now. Babette was not yet free, there had been complications on her side, and on his it was surely only the most obvious common sense to remain with his parents, and coax them both—good-natured simple folk as he knew them to be—into a recognition of his marriage, at least, a disapproving acceptance of it, if not a consent.

Determined as he was upon the wedding plan he and Babette had so recently discussed, he could not but see the supreme importance of harmony between him and his father. Tom had not a penny of his own in the world. And somehow, in the next few days he must accomplish a complete reconciliation with his father, win his consent to the marriage, obtain a week's holiday, perhaps hint at a raise in salary.

It did not seem too much of an undertaking to Tom, who had been spoiled all his life, but because of the extremely short time the circumstances permitted him, he felt that he must begin at once.

So he allowed his voice to soften by imperceptible degrees, looked angry, then cold, then sulky, then repentant, in carefully graduated changes, and finally kissed his mother, and fell, in a mollified tone, into a long, luxurious talk with her, during

which he had an opportunity to speak in glowing terms about Babette; a pleasure for which he had long been hungry.

There was no formal reconciliation with Peter, but Tom, handsome, stern, unusually quiet, was respectful and tacitly docile; and dinner, or rather the heavy cold supper that always followed a big holiday feast, was accordingly tremulously peaceful. Peter listened to Tom's remarks about the business respectfully, Tom laughed quietly at all his father's jokes, and Mollie was agitatedly satisfied, her heart singing a very pæan of joy and gratitude to God as she served cold ham, stiff raspberry jam, potato salad, and large cups of hot chocolate.

But beneath the surface the deep waters still ran. Tom went to Ross Valley on the following Sunday, and walked with Babette in a wet, dripping, leafy lane. She dared not ask him into her father's house. The news she had for him cut far deeper than anything his parents could say.

"There'll have to be a delay, Tom, dear. For a few weeks—maybe only a week. But I've had to delay the divorce itself a few weeks, Tom, there was no other way! I've talked to my lawyer, old Mr. Meyers, who's been so awfully sympathetic and fine through it all, and I've talked to my father—and they both say that if I go into court on Tuesday for my absolute decree, Max will have his own lawyer there to prevent the judge granting it. He'll declare his intention of filing that counter-suit."

She was bundled into the old fur coat he knew so well, her little face looked anxious and worn under a small hat. The road beneath their feet when they came to a crossing, sucked and splashed with mire and mud, and Babette's little shoes were clotted with it.

They walked up and down under a dreary row of shabby locusts, whose last discoloured foliage was hanging forlornly to denuded boughs. Matted leaves were thick underfoot, chrysanthemums languished in the bare suburban gardens and sent a sharp, pungent scent into the cool, still winter day. Babette stooped suddenly, and rose with two wet, exquisitely fragrant violets, on long, jointed stems, in her fingers, and held them to Tom's nose.

A soft, enveloping fog was smothering the little town, moving in rounded, stealthy banks in the wet lanes, softening all distance into shifting walls of grey-blue. Into it the blue wood smoke rose from wet roofs, and through it the voices of passers-by came with booming suddenness, and vanished as quickly.

Stiff old dead weeds, milkweed and yarrow, beaded softly with mist, stood against the fences; there had been heavy rains, and emerald grass had sprouted up richly against fence-posts and through the burned pale brown of the dead old grass. Little girls, importantly wheeling their Christmas doll-carriages, came by, lifted bodily, carriages and all, over the muddy crossings by the attendant fathers.

There was a walk, two planks wide, beside the road, and Babette and Tom followed it.

"It's horrible over here, a day like this!" the woman said, shuddering. "Winter in the country is nothing but mud and smoke! We all begin to yawn about eight o'clock, and we usually go off to bed at nine——"

Tom made no answer, and they went on for a moment in silence. Then Tom said suddenly and wretchedly:

"~~My God~~, but I'm worried about all this!"

"Oh, I know——" she said, quickly, a faint hint of apology in her tone. "It's awful. I'm so worried, among them all, that I don't know what to do! Mama cries, and my father is furious at me, and you know I haven't any money of my own——"

Money. Tom's young brow darkened. He hated money himself. He would have loved to have her laugh at it, dare everything, lift him on the wave of her own courage. He felt a sort of flatness, despondency descend upon him.

"Money isn't everything," he said, dully. He had a vision of three rooms in the Mission—himself unpacking a basket of butter and eggs and chops, Babette in a blue apron, experimenting with a gas stove—laughter—courage——

"No, but money's extremely important!" she reminded him, sharply.

"I don't think so," Tom muttered, stubbornly.

A quite sensible wave of coldness swept between them.

"Well, anyway, it isn't money now," Babette concluded. "The minute I move, Max does. I could go into town and get my divorce next week——"

"*Could?*" Tom echoed, forlornly.

"Could if I hadn't promised to wait," Babette said.

"I knew they'd work on you until you promised!" Tom said, bitterly.

Babette's pride was touched.

"They didn't work on me at all," she repeated his phrase sharply. "I'm not a baby! But Max's lawyers saw mine, and he would have filed a counter-suit then and there if I hadn't promised to wait!"

Tom was silent. He was heartsick with disappointment.

"I oughtn't to be walking here with you now, I oughtn't to take *any* chances, Papa says," Babette, her own pain obscurely soothed by the additional stabs to him, added a little primly. Her heart misgave her when he meekly turned back toward the town they had somewhat left behind them.

Tom felt that he had lost her, and his thoughts refused to move beyond the moment of parting that was now so close. Where could he go, what could he do, what was left in life without Babette? To go home—to eat, talk, somehow employ himself? He could not even kiss her, out in this desolate coldness and wetness, wandering along between shabby fences, in the softly moving fog. She was nervously eager to terminate even this much of a meeting, glancing behind her now and then as if she feared detection, more than once suggesting that she might be followed.

"Babette—sweetheart!" he said, trying to recapture the late mood of glorious daring. "Come to town on Tuesday, get your decree, and marry me within the hour! Then it'll all straighten itself out, darling, your people will come 'round, and so will mine, and you won't have to face all this miserable family fuss!"

She conceded him a brief worried smile; the whole scheme, he saw, with suddenly reddened cheeks, appeared to her utterly fantastic.

"No, Tom dear, we can't do that. We must be patient. I'll write you to-morrow, after Papa and I have seen Meyers."

"You don't love me," Tom, pacing at her side, said from the depth of black despair, and after a silence.

"Oh, I do, Tom! But they are driving me almost mad!"

He had presently to let her go, and to see the fur-muffled figure vanish into the gently enclosing fog; Tom made the train and boat-trip home in a deep study, seeing nothing of what went on about him. He reviewed yesterday's telephone conversation that had led to his coming to see her in Ross Valley. Perhaps it had been a mistake. Had her voice sounded cold?

Poor little thing, they were all bullying her and bewildering her, working like the merciless brutes they were upon her devotion to her child! She had said that the delay might be of weeks, it is true, but what were weeks? He must be generous to her.

In a few mere weeks she would be his—she *had* said that. Many a man would thank God humbly for the prospect of such happiness in a few months, a few years—much less a few weeks! Since they loved each other nothing else mattered; Tom heard Joe Riordan, in the office, remark accidentally the next day that he and his wife had been engaged for four years, and felt honestly ashamed of himself.

With a sort of feverish absorption he made himself valuable to his father in the business; stern, interested, tireless, and Peter, watching him with eyes much wiser than Tom dreamed they were, reflected grimly upon the way "the creatures" could suddenly profit by parental precept and advice when their eyes were suddenly opened to the personal profit in such a course.

He and Tom went home together, alluded to business details at dinner, discussed politics as man to man, and laughed at remembered bits of diplomacy or adroitness.

"Going out to-night, Tom?"

"No, sir. Just hanging 'round Ma and the kids."

"If Kate comes over, give us some music, will you?"

"Sure. Did you get me that song, Cecy?"

"It's there on the piano."

A murmuring, happy sort of peace would descend upon the big, homely sitting room, with its rep curtains and books and lamps, its big chairs and tables. Mollie would admonish Ellen, in an undertone; Martin yawn, stretch, drop pencils, roll in his chair; Tom and his father rustle newspapers; and Allie click knitting needles or study the pattern presented upon her darning ball, by the worn heel of a sock.

"Can't you get a book, Cecy?"

"Nothing I specially want to read."

"I hate to see you sitting there with your hands laying idle, dear. Would you like to 'phome, May Cudahy, that she and Leo'd come over, and you'd all have some games, 'Five Hundred' or something?"

"Oh I'm all right, Mama." Cecy's tone would be devoid of any trace of interest or energy.

"There's the new *Rocket* with all about the big ball down the Peninsula in it, and pitchers where they were all dressed up like monks and Spanish girls, and I don't know what all," Allie might tactlessly suggest. Cecilia might merely glance at her, in deep resentment and coldness. Or, if her voice could be safely lowered below the reach of her father's ears, she might say:

"If I can't *have* any good times in my life, at least I don't have to read about the good times other people have!"

"Ellen, you dressing up as a nun, and scaring the hearts out of them at recreation," Mollie's low, half-amused, and half-admonitory voice would continue, as if she were not following closely, and sick with sympathy for Cecy's mood, "what possessed you that you'd do a thing like that? You're getting to be such a big, tall ger'rl now, it's an awful thing if you haven't got good sense——"

Ethel Merry had dropped Cecy as easily and simply as she had dropped a dozen other bosom friends and confidantes of an

hour. The instant any particular intimate ceased to feed Ethel's own serene vanity, listen to her in rapt interest, and stimulate her by breathless comment, Ethel was done with her. Dion Taylor Cecy never saw nowadays; Dion lived for pleasure, and his pleasures ran in rapidly followed grooves: tennis with a certain small group, golf with a certain other group, whole days of bridge playing with a third. He was well into his thirties now, and sufficiently spoiled to enjoy a fresh sensation of interest in a fresh face.

"I hope I get a case on one of the girls!" Dion, starting on a yachting trip, would say to his men friends quite simply. His way with women was definite and swift, and he enjoyed all the preliminaries of a fresh love affair like a connoisseur: the glances, the little Monday note with flowers, the tea-times when long murmuring conversation took place in some perfumed drawing room.

Cecy ceaselessly planned an attack upon him, skilfully timed, perhaps helped by some fortunate accident. If she could but meet him casually as on that happy morning in Chinatown, some day when she was looking her best, glance up at him half reproachfully and half laughingly, ask youthfully: "Dion, have I done something to make you cross at me?"—raise the whole thing to the dignity of a lovers' quarrel, everything might yet smooth out beautifully.

She watched anniversaries carefully; it was only two years since they had met, after all. It was only three—four—five months since they had been so happy together, during that last visit with Ethel, after all! Why, only last summer he had come to the Lake, when darling little Paul was so ill, and had been perfectly charming, and made even Tom admit that he was one of the nicest of fellows.

Last summer! Cecy tried to laugh at her own desolate fears and loneliness when she thought of it. A few months ago!

But she had grown older, grown thin and nervous.

"Do you pray about it, Cecy?" her mother asked her, a little shamefacedly one March morning, when she came into the girl's room, as she often did, to discover Cecy lying, tearless and pale,

across her big bed, her hands locked behind her head, her dull eyes fixed vaguely upon the plaster scrolls and rosettes of the high ceiling.

"Oh, *pray*, Mama!" Cecilia echoed, sitting up, putting her feet on the floor, and raising her hands to her tumbled hair. Her voice was a mixture of impatience, anger, and utter weariness. "Oh, *dear*," she went on, frantically and despairingly, "if you and Aunt Allie *only* wouldn't talk to me! If you'd *only* —I don't mean to be rude, Mama, but if you'd *only* leave me alone! There's *nothing* the matter with me, and I'm *all* right, and you only drive me absolutely *crazy* when you talk about it—when you talk as if there *was* anything to talk about, when there absolutely *isn't!*"

And Cecy went to the deep embrasure of a bay window, and stood there crying, and staring with swimming eyes into the dull greyness of the double row of wooden houses that faced the hilly street.

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. CUNNINGHAM, perhaps more harassed than she herself realized by Cecy's unfortunate affair, by Tom's incredible infatuation for a woman who was both divorced and a Jewess, and by the constant anguish of watching the feeble, painful, and only partial return to health of her youngest born, accepted the news of Kate's happy engagement to John Kelly in a captious and impatient spirit.

John and Kate walked out to the Mission, to tell the big family, upon a balmy March evening, reaching the Howard Street house just as dinner ended, and sharing the Cunninghams' lavish dessert.

There was laughter, there were kisses and shouts and good wishes and confusion enough to satisfy the most exacting of nieces and cousins, which Kate surely was not, as soon as the news was whispered by Kate herself, into Peter's ear, yet Mollie had small share in them, and Kate instantly noted the omission.

Mollie merely smiled, a smile of infinite superiority, and assumed a somewhat bored, highly incredulous, and amusedly scornful air. Kate saw it, and her own radiant smile faded a trifle, and her cheeks grew hot. Was there anything essentially ridiculous in her becoming engaged to John?

"Well, what do you think of that, Mom?" Tom demanded, when the ecstatically content pair, arms linked, and with John's big shoulder bent protectingly toward Kate's, had gone upon their way, and the Cunninghams were alone again.

"Think of what?" Mollie asked, innocently, with a vague eye.

"Think of what! *Hear* her! Why, of the engagement?"

Surprised at her tone, everyone had turned to look expectantly at Mollie, who now rocked comfortably, while she answered:

"Well, of course I think it's nonsense! Marry? Them two? It's the silliest thing I ever heard in the longest day I ever lived."

"Oh, but what do you say that for, Mama?" Peter, who had a deep respect for her judgment in all such matters, demanded in astonishment.

"Well, because it's so silly!" Mollie assured him, with a sort of gentle impatience. "Robbie's Kate and Jawn Kelly—I never heard the like! Nothin'll come of it."

"Don't you think so, Mama?" Cecilia, not entirely displeased at such an idea, demanded, wide-eyed.

"Your children ain't the only ones that'll ever have anything good come their way, you know, Mollie," Allie reminded her, mildly.

"Well, indeed," Mollie answered, flaring quickly, "if they did, I wouldn't thank you for Jawn Kelly, nor ten of him done up in store-paper, as my grandmother used to say! A feller Pete took into the business out of the warm charitable heart he had on him for an orphan that wouldn't have a new pair of shoes from Candlemas to Epiphany, and now me fine lad is stravagin' about and has all the airs of Pat's gander! I wish him well, and Kate too, and where'd *she* be if I hadn't done for her like one of my own, and Pete paid her poor mother's funeral expenses and my brother Robbie's, too, God rest him——"

"Well, Mollie, there's no harm in their takin' a fancy to each other," Peter interposed, mildly, as she fell into a sort of aggrieved sing-song, and the family continued to regard her with astonishment.

"No, and I hope they'll do well, and always remember who gave the both of them their start!" his wife answered, rapidly and acidly, and fell silent.

"Kate said they might be married in the fall, and they mightn't be until after Christmas," Cecilia, with her ideas on the subject somewhat agreeably altered, reported interestedly.

"Christmas!" Mollie, with a brief laugh, and a toss of her head, repeated incredulously, and again was silent. "You'd wonder where they think they're going to get their house and

furniture, what with gas and heat and all; and is Kate to walk out on Maggie and her grandmother—that has the force of the rheumatism——"

"Why, you're a lot of old crabs!" Tom interrupted, reproachfully and gaily. "Here's Kate and John in seventh heaven, and you all talking as if some misfortune had come to them! He's a fine fellow, and Kate is the most beautiful thing I ever saw, and one of the best, by George, and they're both darned lucky——"

"And nobody said they weren't," Mollie reminded them, sharply, "and if Kate can settle it with her conscience to desert her grandmother, that took care of her when she was a little helpless baby, and if Jawn Kelly thinks he can afford to support a wife, and perhaps lend a hand with my poor brothers when sickness or shortness of work makes times hard, well and good! I kissed her and I wished her well, and if she comes to see me I'll be glad to see her, and there's an end to it. I done for her what I hope God would send someone to do for my own, and the thanks I get is that she walks in on us, and flaunts her engagement in our faces, and it's 'Oh, we're so happy!' and 'I never guessed he loved me!' and all the rest of it, and all over a young feller that may have a job to-morrow and may not!"

"As far as job goes," Peter said, in a somewhat sobered and a patient tone, "you're wrong there, Mama. Jawn's in the firm now, you know."

"Well, then, the more fools them that let him in!" Mollie answered, briefly. "There's a thousand engagements every year, and here Kate's only one more of them, and that's enough of it!"

The subject, much to the family's bewilderment, was accordingly dropped, and a certain doubt of the wisdom of the affair crept into whatever was subsequently said of it. Kate and John Kelly—why, how could Kate get married? And where would John be if it wasn't for Papa?

Mollie, having magnificently established this attitude in her own household, went to see her mother and sister, and spread the doctrine, on the following day.

"Will you ask them about Kate?" Allie asked her, before she left, and Mollie answered, indifferently:

"I will if I think of it."

But both she and Allie knew that she was going for no other purpose, and old Mrs. Walsh, when her prosperous, well-married daughter came into the kitchen, as she did almost every two or three days, knew exactly her reason for coming, too.

Mollie was devoted to her old mother, and the two families enjoyed an insatiable interest in each other's concerns. To-day she found her enjoying a three-o'clock cup of strong tea at the kitchen table. The dark spring day was streaming with rain, and there was grey twilight in the cluttered, odorous kitchen.

"Hello, Mollie," her mother greeted her, in her soft minor accents. "I didn't feel like nothin' at lunch," she added, explanatorily, with a glance at the glazed brown teapot, "and when Mag went out I thought I'd have a taste of tea—— Harry's layin' down in there," she interrupted herself, with a jerk of her head in the general direction of the bedrooms; "he felt awful bad—Charley said it was somethin' he et over to Daly's——"

"Oh, for goodness' sakes!" Mollie commented, mildly regretful, as the older voice died peacefully away into silence. "You look well, Ma," she added, affectionately.

This last was purely formal, for old Mrs. Walsh, garbed in dingy black serge, and further wrapped in a small crocheted shoulder cape of purple and black, had not altered in appearance for twenty years. Her small wrinkled face was of the colour and contour of a walnut, her bright old eyes were oyster-grey, her crinkly thin hair grizzled and oily.

"I'm doin' good," she conceded. "I had the rheumatism very strong on me, but savin' your presence, didn't he give me somethin' that made me sweat very profuse——"

She brooded over her cup. Mrs. Cunningham rocked comfortably.

"Would you like the lights, the way it wouldn't be so grey here?"

"Oh, not for me!"

"Well, tell me," said Mrs. Walsh, after a silence, "how's the child to-day?"

"The child" was always Paul, nowadays. His mother sighed as she gave a cheerful account of him.

"He's very resigned to his cross, God love 'um," his grandmother commented, sadly. "There was a fam'ly lived near me father's place, in the old country," she added, musingly, "that had a young boy of three years that had a great trile come upon him. Such a stren'th of weakness come over him that he cuddent put fut to the ground. 'Mama!' he'd yell, 'come carry Bernie!' That was his name—Bernie. 'Bernie can't walk no more!' he'd say, and she with her face like a curd itself, runnin' up to pick him up, and pack him about wherever he'd be. Well, she had an aunt, that was a nun in Donegal, and didn't that one dream, in a quare sort of dream one night, that it was a blessin' sint to thim, that they'd be drawn nearer to God, with the sore trile it was to have the young boy so sick on thim——"

"Well, indeed I often think that of Paul," Mollie agreed, in a silence, and with another long sigh. "Maybe Peter and I were too proud of the whole set of them, though indeed God knows when I lost my little Daisy, that'd be sixteen now, there was small pride in me then! I thought I'd never smile again!"

Silence, while the rain slashed and streamed, and smoke came down the crazy little cottage chimney in acrid puffs, and cleared away again.

"Where's Maggie?" Mollie presently asked.

"She was havin' all the throuble there is in it with the Gayley child's dress," her mother reported. "Didn't she make the two sleeves short on the child, and scorch them with the flat when she len'thened thim. She run out to see could she match the stuff—can she do it I don't know. What's Tom doin'?"

"Pete says he's working very good," Mollie answered, with her ample bosom once more rising and falling suddenly. "But he says the child is like one that has a fever upon him——"

"Whativer possest him that he'd run after a woman like that?" his grandmother mused. "He that cud have had his pick and choice!"

So far, no mention of Kate. Both women were warily avoiding the subject. To bring it up was to lose a point. Mollie could not be effectively scoffing until her mother had been betrayed into effusiveness; old Mrs. Walsh could not hope to combat any criticism or lack of enthusiasm on Mollie's part, if she had first been indiscreetly exultant.

The rain hammered down, the roof spattered and dripped. Mrs. Walsh shook the teapot, looked into it with a sharp old eye, drew her crocheted cape about her shrivelled little shoulders, and sniffed. She dragged toward her, from a chair, a worn old black silk bag that looked like a miniature collapsed balloon. The contents of this bag had never been revealed, but the family knew that it contained knitting and darning, and the accessories of each, small boxes and bottles of pills, newspaper clippings and flower seeds, scissors, spectacles, large rumpled handkerchiefs, rosary beads, silk rags, old cravats, twisted little striped paper bags of hoarhound and lemon drops, odd documents regarding taxes or assessments, and black-edged "death cards."

The bag was never quite out of its mistress's reach. To-day she clawed knowingly, and without glancing down, within its depths, and brought forth a crochet needle and a ball of white string, with which she proceeded on the work of a scalloped washcloth. Mollie, heavy and rustling in silk, rocked thoughtfully, and for a while the fall of the rain and the creaking of the rocker were the only sounds heard in the kitchen.

The floor, chipped and splintery, was dark with age and the stains of spilled liquids and grease. The rusty, heat-distorted stove drifted grey ashes, and was flanked by a large grocery box stuffed with newspapers, kindling, odd lumps of coal, and the casually flung sweepings of the floor. Empty cereal and egg boxes and tin cans, emptied too, but still wearing their bright dress of pictured tomatoes and peaches, surmounted the fuel.

The table was covered with a red cloth, somewhat rumpled and crumby, and set with odd cups, sugar-bowl, teapot, and a large plate of cut bread. Butter, strong and freckled with white flecks of salt, was on a blue saucer. Kate's best waist, clean

and frilly, was hanging on a hanger behind the stove. Beyond the window and a strip of dripping porch were neighbouring backyards, and the back of the big stable in Ellis Street, all caught to-day in a grey curtain of rain.

The sink was a tangle of dishpan and spattered dishes, the loosened soot from burned pots drifting in flakes upon the grey, cool water. Maggie, coming in from the street, mentioned it apologetically.

"Mollie, I wondered would you be here! Didn't I make the sleeves of the Gayley child's dress two full inches short, and then after I'd pieced it, what'd I do but scorch it?" Maggie demanded, with a wet, breathless, and wholly affectionate kiss. "I've been all day on it—I declare I got all worked up over it! I had to run half over town to match it, and now I'll be up to midnight makin' the sleeves all over again. And me with a terrible headache when I woke up this morning, and to-morrow Sunday, when I can't sew a stitch, and Mrs. Gayley very high-spoken over it, when she, 'phomed, and askin' me what there was about a child's dress that made such a touse——"

And Maggie sat down, in one of her rare moods of high spirits. Mollie knew that her sister was often stimulated by mischances into a sort of desperate good humour, but it was not that to-day. To-day she was pleased about Kate's engagement.

"I'll get at the dishes as soon as I've my good skirt off," Maggie planned, stretching her hand for the teapot. She also looked into it, rose, jumbled a handful of paper into the stove, and scraped a match on the rusty old iron plates.

"How's Paul?" she asked, at the sink, with the water shrieking into the hot, empty kettle. "A cup of tea is going to taste real good to me," she admitted, as she sat down again, cutting off small bits of bread, slapping against them half their bulk in butter, and chewing the result thoughtfully. "Have some tea, Mollie?"

"Well, maybe I will," Mollie conceded.

The conversation rambled. They talked of the neighbours, of an expected engagement, an expected baby, an expected death.

"How's Kate?" Mollie asked then, driven to it.

"Well, what do you think of Kate's news?" Maggie could then ask, triumphantly. Mollie looked amused, pursed her mouth, shrugged.

"Well, I don't think I'd talk about it yet awhile, Mag. It seems to me early days for talk——"

"Talk never hur'rt nobody yet," put in the old lady, briskly, after a somewhat strained pause. "There was a feller in the old country, and what'd he do but marry a ger'rl that was deef, and so dumb you'd never get a word out of her! 'Oh,' he says, to all the neighbours that'd wonder at him, with a good little farm, and his sister married, that wouldn't do betther for himself than to take a deef and dumb ger'rl that'd never pass you the time of day——" She fell silent, watching both daughters shrewdly.

"But what's the matter with their being engaged, Mollie?" Maggie demanded, astonished. And the real conversation of the day was begun.

When Kate came in, an hour later, fresh and blooming, with her hair curled into what her grandmother called little fish-hooks and clover-leaves with the rain, decent gloom held the kitchen.

Kate dispelled the physical dusk by a brisk flashing on of lights and tied a grey, limp apron about her slender straightness, to attack the dishpan. But to influence the mental and moral dubiousness that had fallen upon her elders was another matter.

It was pointed out to her that while it was all very nice and sweet that she should be engaged to Jawn Kelly, it wasn't as if she was a ger'rl without responsibilities. Of course she'd marry him some day, but it was nonsense to be talking of autumn, or Christmas, "as if there was nothing to it but put your arm in his, and run off to the priest like an Ayrab," as her grandmother expressed it.

There was her salary, to begin with, every penny needed to keep the household afloat. And then there was her help in the kitchen and bedrooms, when her grandmother was ill, or Maggie under a pressure of work. And her poor uncles, what about them? Certainly it would kill Maggie to do everything that had to be done about the cottage, and Mollie was loyal and

heated in protesting that her old mother was not to be overburdened in her age with household duties.

Kate, the bloom and glory suddenly departed from her like a falling garment, went doggedly on with the work of dish-washing. She swashed hot suds, rubbed, wiped, piled; went to and fro between sink and cupboard, laden with hot clean china. She brushed the stove with an old turkey wing already pretty well worn down to the quills, and shook the red tablecloth on the wet porch. Her face grew dark.

"Yes, but do you think it's fair for me to have to give up all my life, Aunt Mollie?" she demanded, in a slightly thickened voice, when her homely task was done, still standing at the sink, but facing the room. "It isn't *my* fault that Uncle Charley and Uncle——"

She stopped, proud and angry, her throat thick.

"No, dear," Mollie assured her, lovingly and eagerly. "Indeed it's not your fault! But look at your poor Aunt Maggie here, Kate, who was engaged to Frank Cahill. She had to give up *her* life, and a blessed and wonderful opportunity it was for her——"

"I don't see it," Kate said, stubbornly. "Frank Cahill died!"

"Well, you couldn't expect any blessing to follow a girl who turned her back upon those that raised her, Kate," Mollie argued, patiently, as Maggie, shocked at this allusion, began to cry. "You had no mother and father to do for you, like Uncle Pete and me do for the children. If Maggie and Grandma——"

"So I'm to let John Kelly go," Kate suggested, bitterly; "the man I love—and who loves me——"

"No, *dear*," Mollie supplied eagerly, distressed; "be engaged to him all you want to! But I'd make up my mind to a long engagement, that's all. When Harry's better, and Charley gets work again, then it'll all be different. Or maybe Maggie might go in working with somebody like Miss Donovan, who has so many to sew for——"

Kate, wiping the already well-wiped sink-board with a rag, looked mutinous. Her breast rose and fell stormily, but she made no further protest.

"By all means consider yourself engaged!" Mollie advised. She felt a prick of compunction, leaving the cottage just as one of her utterly inefficient brothers lumbered in, to catch the glint of a tear in Kate's proud eyes.

She did not know herself exactly why the thought of Kate's engagement to John Kelly galled her. But it was jealousy, pure and simple. Jealousy for Cecy, who was not engaged; jealousy for Tom, who was so unhappily in love; jealousy of the first marriage, which should have been among the ranks of her own children, and in the big house.

And jealousy deeper than this personal jealousy. The envy of the stout middle-aged woman for the young and exquisite one, the envy of the wife and mother who has loved her rank, for the fragrant, mystified girl who is to be initiated into all these wonders.

Kate, Robbie's little orphaned Kate, would be the wife of Peter's young partner. Kate's young hand bound with a gold ring, Kate a wife, Kate seriously considering data, counting on her rapping fingers to nine. Kate bearing a first child—that muffled, heart-shaking, wailing baby whose coming means that a woman is born, too.

The thought of this stung and writhed in Mollie's heart. She could be neither reasonable nor generous to Kate. All the glory and happiness seemed to have gone out of her own magnificence and achievement, and to be transferred to this insignificant niece. What with Paul crippled, Cecy disconsolate, and Tom involved with the sort of woman Mollie imagined Babette Newman to be, there was small pleasure in the contemplation of her own group.

And to have Kate so radiantly queening it over them all! No; Mollie had been generosity itself to Kate, up to this point. But this was too much.

"We'll have her talking of presents, and a house, and a trip, and clothes, and dear knows what all, and I'll not stand it!" Mollie thought, resentfully. "I'm not going to have Cecy holding the umbrella over Robbie's Kate!"

And Mollie was the family dictator. Nobody questioned her

decisions, and even Peter was won so quickly to her point of view that he talked seriously to Jawn about it.

"I wouldn't move too quick, Jawn," he warned his young partner, reluctantly. "It isn't only money—my wife and I have sent her mother money every month since we were married, I guess you know that. But they really need the ger'rl; she's the backbone and stay of them all, Maggie and the old lady, and them poor brothers of my wife's—— I don't know what they'd ever do without Kate!"

John's face grew stony, but he made no protest. After all, the only person whose opinion mattered was that of his glorious Kate, the sweet, gay, radiant girl whose youth and joy were being hammered down by these grey, merciless seniors. If Kate would defy them, they were helpless. And if Kate would not they might as well chatter.

After the exquisite delight of the understanding that had existed between Kate and himself since Christmas Eve, this cold discussion, this drab, middle-aged publicity was bitterly hard to face. He and Kate had had some hours of inexpressible felicity, in the grimy, dim old Library, or walking the grey winter streets, or, on one or two memorable occasions, talking over some little restaurant table.

Their love had been enough, then. There had not even been talk of marriage in the ecstasy of discovering all the new world of their likes and dislikes, their hopes and dreams, their feeling for each other. Marriage loomed golden and indistinct somewhere in the unbelievably wonderful future, but they could not get beyond the radiant present now.

John, for so many years silent, an outsider, alone, had developed entirely new qualities. He often made Kate laugh, her ringing delicious laugh with the unexpected deep notes of a shaken baby's laugh in it, and she loved his laugh in return, reluctant, brief, with the quality of surprise.

"We'll have to have a little house, Kate."

"Oh, don't!"

"And you'll be Mrs. Kelly—that's a swell name for you! How will you like that?"

"Good gracious! I never thought of that!"

"You'll have cards with 'Mrs. John Rose Kelly' on them. My mother's name was Mary Rose."

"Oh, John, don't! You scare the senses out of me!"

And she would take the conversation back to the mere happy hour; the delight of love confessed, the inexhaustible thrill of awakening passion.

Mollie's attitude, so arbitrarily taken, poisoned all this. Kate's bloom faded, and she grew harassed and anxious again. John became stern and ugly.

"I'm surprised that you'd let people like your Aunt Maggie and your uncles, who have made an absolute failure of everything they ever put their hand to, influence you in a thing like this," John said, bitterly

"Aunt Mollie isn't a failure!"

"No, your Aunt Mollie married a good man, and a darned smart man, and they've made good. And consequently she thinks that she can run the whole family."

"I'm not being influenced by them entirely," Kate reasoned, walking beside him in the Sunday sweetness of the Park. "But I have to think it out for myself, and I'm not sure but what they're right. As they say, it means only my happiness—not even that, but it means my *immediate* happiness against that of four other people. We're young, and they're not, and a curse might follow us if——"

"Oh, a curse!" poor John echoed, desperately. "Leave it to them to make you think that marrying the man you love would bring a curse down on you! You can go on slaving at the Library, washing dishes and carrying in coffee to your uncles, and there'll be a curse on you if you ever try to get out!"

The summary chilled and frightened Kate in her secret heart, but she answered sturdily:

"John, if a thing is for other people, and hard to do, isn't it pretty sure to be right?"

"Of course you can always say that."

The bitterness of death was upon her, and under it the strange sweet passion for martyrdom that runs in Irish blood. She

was paler, thinner, quieter, more beautiful than ever in these days; she bore her cross heroically and without complaint.

"Kate, don't you realize—can't you *see?*—that hundreds of lives have been wrecked because of some such old grannies interfering?"

"I know that it isn't always easy to do the right thing, John, and that hundreds of lives are wrecked because people, especially people in love, have been selfish!"

"Well, when it's too late, you'll see it!"

A smile from the shadowed eyes beneath the flowery new hat.

"You mean you'll fall in love with somebody else?"

"No, I don't mean anything of the kind! You know it, too. But to shut me up every time I speak of setting a date, and to refuse to let me tell people we're engaged, and to put me off even when I try to kiss you—it'd kill anything!" John said with a break in his voice. "We're eating our hearts out, this way, and when I think of years of it, it makes me—— My God, how smug they are, how easy they do it! I want my wife, and my home——"

She had turned ashen white; she walked along at his side without speaking.

"Maybe it won't be so very long, dear," she said, in a sick voice, after a while.

Their meetings grew sober; they were engaged, of course. They would wait for each other, of course. Time wouldn't make any difference, of course.

But meanwhile, there were Kate's grandmother and uncles to think about, and poor Maggie who had quite convinced herself by this time that she had given up Frank Cahill voluntarily, and Uncle Peter who had practically supported the household on Turk Street for dear knows how many years, you couldn't expect him to do more than he was doing. In a little while, if Grandma kept well, and Uncle Harry didn't lose his new job, and Charley got something to do, why then it would all be different. But just now——

So John met Kate in the Library, and they talked soberly and with quiet deep sympathy and understanding, and John

walked home with her, and sat by the sink while she washed the dishes, and they told each other that God, who had brought them together, surely would not try them beyond their strength.

"If it was only the money, Kate, we could live on half of what I'm getting," John would argue, wistfully, wiping a plate by the masculine method of laying it face downward on the table and rubbing its back.

"It isn't only money," she always answered, bravely. "It's that my uncles are always getting into trouble, and nobody ever keeps any accounts here, and never will, and they don't know from one week's end to another what they have, or what they spend. It'd be a constant trial to you, John, never sure what would break loose the minute I left them. But never mind, it won't last for ever!"

CHAPTER XIX

IT WAS the pretty custom of Jean Newman, seven years old, to end each of her meals with a trip to her mother's side, and a smothering hug for Babette. She was a serious little creature, demure and even a trifle reserved; she hung her head before strangers, and was persistently silent, even, when the fancy seized her, with her young uncles and her grandparents. But she was passionately demonstrative with her mother.

Jean was slender, with a mane of rich dark hair falling about her flushed, shy, baby face, and little socked and slippered feet that moved with a sort of fairy lightness. No matter what the occasion or what the company, she would leave her chair, circle the table, and fling herself into her mother's arms when her silver bowl had been duly emptied or her silver plate cleared.

And Babette would strain the elusive, delicate little armful to her heart in an agony of mother love. The little bones that felt as if they might be so easily crushed, the fragrant, firm, cool baby flesh, the brushed hair that smelled so deliciously of soap and sunshine and fresh air she seemed actually to inhale, in the seconds that found Jean in her arms.

She always put Jean to bed at night, an enchanting ceremonial of games and ablutions. Jean, her scarlet little mouth bubbling clean tooth-paste, talked eagerly to her mother. Jean, before her brown little gipsy legs were inserted into the pink and blue frogged pajamas, was kissed between her baby shoulders, and on the soft little bunched backs of her legs, and on the clean soles of her feet, by her mother.

Boodle, the white bear, was kissed, too. Babette knew well the taste of his hairy, clothy nose. And Jean always, in winter, said warningly, "Leave a crack!"

So the door, in the dark months, was duly left open just a tiny

crack. But in summer, especially if they were at Grandfather's big Ross Valley house, Jean went to bed in balmy daylight, and the night had no terrors for her.

At Grandfather's she slept on a porch, and could hear the grown-ups, Aunt Sarah, who was twenty, and was engaged, and Uncle George, who was twenty-two, and Uncle Sidney who was older and had girls, laughing and running about on the tennis court below. She could hear the kitchen door slam lightly, and the two Chinese servants laughing as they rattled tins. She could smell honeysuckle, and dry bay and pepper leaves, and watered lawns.

Jean told her mother that she liked Grandfather's house the best in all the world. Better than Paris or Normandy? Oh, yes, Mummy! Not better than the big, clean ship, where the kind man took them down to see the cakes being made? Oh, yes, Mummy, better than that.

Babette, hearing the asseverations in the passionate little voice, sensing the truth of them through every hour of the child's sheltered happy day, sighed deeply—great sighs that seemed to tear at her soul. This was an ideal environment for little Jean, it had been Babette's own environment through a happy, sheltered childhood, too, and she loved it with all the loyalty of the girl who has left home too soon, and who comes back to its peace and love sadder and wiser, able at last to appreciate it truly.

If on any one of these fragrant, throbbing early summer days, when the whole countryside was splashed with colour and fragrance, blotted with golden light and golden shadows, she applied duly for her divorce, she ended all association with her mother's home as if it had never been.

The divorce they might forgive her. But the immediate marriage with a man as foreign to their world and their circle as Irish Tom Cunningham they never would forgive. She would go out of her father's house for ever when she went to that marriage, and what was harder to think of, her little girl would leave this happy place for ever, too.

To Babette's father and mother there was no idea of com-

promise. They were not compromising persons by nature. Babette, understanding Tom because she loved him, knew well that Tom's people were quickly angry, quickly reconciled, quick to forget. But her parents were logical, proud. When they said that she must choose between this ridiculous infatuation for a man of a different religion, different group, entirely different upbringing and outlook, and themselves—the father and mother to whom she owed life and everything in life—they meant it.

They stated their position, and nothing more was said. Nothing direct, at least, was said. They were very tender with their daughter during the strange spring days, days of drenching green rains and exquisite blue days, and the family ties were imperceptibly tightened on all sides. But there was no open campaign.

Aunt Bertha, the redoubtable Mrs. Napthaly with whom Babette's husband made his home, came to Ross Valley now and then, bringing toys to Jean and one or two handsome presents to Babette. Cousins came in, chattering of family matters. Max Newman was quietly, regretfully, praised. Pity he hadn't taken this turn for the better, this respectable and prosperous turn, earlier! the cousins said sympathetically. Babette's brothers and sister made much of the baby Jean; harmony and love reigned in the comfortable, beautiful house.

Babette walked through the days like a woman in a dream. Before her sober eyes the scales balanced—balanced eternally.

On the one side, Tom. Handsome, Irish, devoted, with that rich catch in his voice that made a little corresponding catch come in her breath. Tom, so pathetic, so endearing a mixture of boyish bravado and manlike devotion——

She would have a little house with Tom. Both their families hostile, and cut out of their lives—not that families mattered!

Or did they matter? Were family ties as strong as love? Perhaps sometimes they were, when a dear little soft girl, wistful and helpless, was concerned. Jean in a little apartment, with a stepfather. Babette and Tom walking in the Park, on Sunday afternoons, with Jean between them.

But no longer the hilarious arrival at the Ross Valley house on Friday afternoons, where Uncle George would catch the child up for a run in his roadster, where Grandma smiled from the hallway where she was settling sprawling brick and gold and brown velvet nasturtiums in a clear glass bowl.

No longer a servant carrying "Miss Babette's" bags upstairs to the big chintzy, shadowy room with the oak boughs spreading outside the awninged windows. No; an apartment somewhere in the city, and Tom Cunningham.

Babette would stare at his picture, the handsome, smiling face would seem absolutely unreal to her—seem to represent nothing.

The life of the house went on. Sally, her sister, had visiting girl friends on Saturday afternoons, laughter echoed about the place, and the tinkling of ukuleles. George, Babette's brother, lounged about in white flannels, smoking, yawning, discussing golf clubs. The gold sunlight of early summer fell steadily upon the rounded tops of the oaks, upon the velvet lawns, upon stretched awnings and the twinkling black of the motor-cars. And Babette wandered through it all, dreaming, pondering, often faintly frowning.

Max Newman wanted her to forgive him, to try again. She knew, even though they never voiced the thought, that her father—her mother—wanted her to give Max another trial. Sally, curling her heavy black hair, remarked briefly that Babette was awful mean if she didn't at least see poor Max.

Little Jean would fret, would be lonely, in the small establishment Tom Cunningham could maintain. And then suppose Max came after the child and carried her off to Mama and Aunt Bertha again? And suppose that Babette, her resistance weakened by sheer confusion and discouragement, presently conceded, as so many other divorced mothers had come to concede, that "for the child's sake" the best place for her was no longer beside her mother? Her heart turned sick at the thought. Babette was a clever woman, and she knew that the instant she married Tom Cunningham all the pressure that Jean's father and her own parents could bring to bear would be sprung

in full force upon her. The child herself would be won away by the memories of these happy days at Grandfather's, by the promise of a pony or a tricycle.

And Babette would be a bride, occupied with all the readjustment of the first married months—occupied, it was extremely possible, with pressing financial cares, if Tom's father, even for a time, really kept his threat of dismissing and disowning him. And then suppose her health——

She felt almost mad with the constant agonizing pressure of her own thoughts. It seemed impossible for her to decide. In the back of her heart and mind she reiterated, or rather held fixedly to an unworded decision that of course she would marry Tom, and that, in no case, would a reconciliation with Max be even considerable. But all plans involving Tom had a way of becoming alarmingly hazy when she was away from him, and on the rare occasions when they met she was surprised to find herself captious, cruelly disappointed, fretted by love and doubt, and more thoroughly unsettled than ever.

One June morning, after the exchange of several distressed letters, he came to Ross Valley to see her.

It was a still, exquisite morning, bathed in soft warm sunlight. There had been an early fog; thin wisps of it still clung in the cañons and drifted high in the tops of the redwoods. The dew lingered still, in the shade, and the dry air was sweet with tarweed and burned Indian grass.

Babette was pale and quiet. She had no joy in this interview; she had been lying awake through the short, warm, moon-flooded night. Max—Tom—Max—Tom, had moved through her thoughts. And at dawn she had come suddenly, with all the force of a spiritual conviction, to her decision.

Quietly, on a great wave of pain and of awakening, she had seen what she must do. No convert, facing a hostile world in the flame of a new faith, ever had undergone a more definite experience than did Babette, as she turned exhausted, beaten, on her pillow, and sank into deep, peaceful sleep, just as the day crept into her mother's garden.

She would not get her divorce and marry Tom. She would not escape with her child to Paris and make her own living shopping with American tourists. She would not continue the present half-life, moping about her father's house between wifehood and girlhood, wretchedly tied yet wretchedly alone.

But sadly, with dignity, and for her child's sake, she would consent to try Max again. The exulting whisper would run through the ranks of the family; cousins and aunts, warmly approving, would come in to see pale, silent Babette, who had forgiven her husband unforgivable wrongs.

On the one side—Tom, and all the triumphant disapproval of the family if life with Tom went wrong, if Jean suffered, if it proved a mistake.

On the other hand—everything: their approval, their gifts, the grateful, passionate admiration. French hats again, bright with velvet poppies, melting into velvet straws, new frocks, every word attended, every mood studied. Max would be humble—servile. Babette would have her own car, now, her furs—her trips——

Her lips curled. Max in recent letters had begged her just to try him—just to come back to him, not as his wife, he would never expect that again, but as his honoured and adored friend—his sister——!

"Well," thought Babette, gritting her teeth, and on a stormy breath, "he'll get what he asks for! I'll do it—I'll go back to him—let him take me to New York, keep the surface smooth—for my baby's sake! But I'll never have another happy minute, and I'll never be his wife again!"

The morning had become warmer. Her mother's garden —Mrs. Garberg was a simple, quiet woman, who lived for her garden—was rich with colour and scent on the still June morning. Blue shafts of delphinium caught the light; masses of yellow daisies; verbena in every shade of lavender and pink, purple and dead white; humble brilliant marigolds and sturdy gillyflowers shared the bright blots of sunshine and shade. Along the edge of the lawn, border pinks swooned in toppling fringes of bloom;

fragrant syringa, clean in deep green and creamy white rose in rounded bushes, and the first of the foxgloves stood forth like candles against the dark background of the wood.

All so regulated, so ordered, blazing window boxes, striped awnings, the grass-cutter clicking, the water-sprayers flinging diamonds into the air. The garage was set in ranks of bloom; clean shadows fell blue upon raked gravel walks. And indoors there were jars and bowls of flowers reflecting themselves in polished surfaces, white-clad Chinese dusting furniture and baking rolls, table-linen, glassware, all the comfortable beauty of a luxurious home.

The brown linen gown Babette wore, as she walked slowly through all the peace and beauty of it to the side gate, was another note in the utter luxury of it all.

Jean was playing in her sandpile, with a neighbour's child, another sweet curly-headed little girl with bare knees and healthily tanned round cheeks. Jean and Alice—they would not be separated.

"I do it for her!" Babette thought. Tom could say nothing to that argument, and she need use no other.

She waited at the field gate back of the empty stable, and presently Tom, driving the car that had become his only as long ago as last Christmas, came along the old road. He looked at her eagerly; he was pale, and wore an anxious air. A great smile of relief lighted his handsome face as she smiled and climbed in beside him, packing her thin linen skirts tightly about her as she sat down.

"~~God!~~ I've been thinking all the way, if you weren't standing there—back of the stable——!"

Babette smiled again, sadly, tenderly. They went on and on, into sweet open country, without further words.

The roadside grass was already brown and dry and slippery; the encircling hills as tawny as crouching leopards. Even in June the hay was cocked, piled fearlessly in the fields that no water would touch until Thanksgiving.

They passed little brown cottages, with climbing roses on the wire fences, and babies in faded rompers digging in the gardens.

Eucalyptus and oaks shaded the rambling country road; the orchards were in heavy leaf, and burdened with golden apricots and the bright vermilion enamel of cherries.

The car rumbled over a sunken bridge white with powdery dust, passed primitive camps where spattered cars were parked under oaks, and where girls in khaki breeches were idling at bare pine camp tables. Babette said to herself: "Half-past eleven. At one I will be having lunch with the family, and it will all be over!"

They had left houses and camps behind them, and were up in the foothills now. With a quick twist Tom brought the car to a standstill under a great group of roadside oaks. Behind them rose the sharp spur of Tamalpais, dim and dreaming, ultramarine against the paler sky; below, the wooded slopes fell away to the marshes that were threaded with shining canals, and the massed spikes of the distant shipping, and the blue glitter of the cities—San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland—about the irregular circle of the bay.

For a moment they sat silent, their eyes upon the panorama below them. Babette was wondering how she should begin. Tom saw that she was tired and nervous, and feared any bungling on his part.

"What's the news, dear?" he asked, gently, after a while.

"Oh, news—?" she echoed, wearily. "What news could there be? It's—deadlock."

"Don't say that, dear," Tom begged her, infinitely distressed. "There are times like this in all our lives——"

"Why," Babette demanded, with a note of passion, a note of breaking, in her voice, "why can't people be kind? Your people —my people! Why do they have to *torture* us so!"

"Because we haven't the courage to shake ourselves free of them," Tom answered, steadily, after a pause.

"Oh, Tom, it's not that!" she answered, impatiently. "No amount of courage would free Jean if her father chose to fight for her!"

"Dearest," Tom said, "how you let them worry you! How could he fight for her?"

"Ah," Babette sighed, dropping her head on his shoulder, and resting against him like a limp and weary bird, "you don't know him! I wish"—she added, dreamily—"I wish I could just stay here for ever, with your arm about me——"

There was a long silence. She had taken off her hat, and Tom kissed the soft waves of her dark hair.

"Tom, aren't they cruel to force a mother—through her child?"

"Cruel! But they aren't forcing you, dear, they're only trying to!"

Babette thought that perhaps she would face them all down, after all. He was young now, but Tom Cunningham would be a husband to be proud of, some day.

"If only I had your courage, Tom! But they threaten to take Jean away——"

"On the evidence of a servant!"

"Well—she has notes—I wrote you that——"

"Damn her and her notes!" Tom exclaimed, heartily. "All you have to do is say that Newman himself practically deserted you——"

"Oh, Tom, but it's all dreadful. The publicity—the awful shadow on Jean——"

They were silent again, Babette's thoughtful eyes on the widespread landscape that was swimming with all the beauty of early summer, Tom's eyes upon her face.

"Max sent word through my aunt that he wanted to take Jean to the circus next week," Babette presently said, slowly.

"Nerve!" Tom commented, disgustedly.

"Nerve, yes. But they all thought I ought to consent."

"They didn't take that tone awhile back!" Tom reminded her.

"No, but they're all back of him now. My Aunt Bertha said that you couldn't blame a man for wanting his own baby girl——"

She was silent a long time. Then she sighed deeply and said:

"Oh, if something would only *end* it!"

Tom made no remark, and after a moment Babette went on:

"You see, it means giving up everything, Tom. My father and mother, Jean perhaps—everything——"

"Well, for me, too," he reminded her, with a rueful smile.

"Ah, but they're Irish," she said, wistfully, "they'd forgive you!"

"They might forgive me," Tom conceded, slowly. "But nothing would ever make them think I was married. I would be excommunicated—they would think my soul lost, and while our marriage went on think of me as 'living in sin.' That's the —delightful phrase, for it. You can imagine the effect upon my mother, and that there wouldn't be much intercourse between the two families!"

He looked down at the thoughtful face upon his shoulder with a grim, brief smile, and Babette raised her troubled eyes for a half smile in return.

"Oh, dear!" she breathed, returning her gaze to the countryside again. And she knew that she would never let him do that. No, she had the excuse, first and foremost, of going back to her husband for her child's sake; and secondly, she could not wreck Tom's life.

"Tom, dear, promise me this. That whatever I decide, whatever I'm driven to—you'll know I acted for the best?" she murmured.

"Ah, my darling, how can you tease me so? Don't speak as if there could be any way out of it but one!" Tom pleaded, close to her ear.

"I get so discouraged, Tom——"

She ended the interview upon that note: weariness, doubt, wistfulness. She promised, when he put her down at the old stable gate again, that she would write him.

And write him she did, only a few days later. Max, humble, tender, eager, was with her when she mailed the letter. He and Babette were crossing the broad Embarcadero at the ferry, coming from Ross Valley, on their way to Oakland, when Babette stopped at a green mail-box, and put up her immaculate white glove, and slipped the letter under the metal flap.

In Oakland their Pullman drawing room, on the long Over-

land train, awaited them. Max had been summoned to a convention in Atlantic City. Babette was accompanying him. Her family, loving and united once more, accompanied her to the train. Babette wore a new pongee suit, a gauze veil wreathed her smart little travelling hat. She was quiet, sweet with a new sweetness, her dark eyes were sad.

Her father gave her a check "to buy pretties in New York." Her mother clung to her, whispering: "You won't ever be sorry you made Mama so happy, dear." Sidney, Sally, George, looked new respect for her; all the cousins and aunts were devoted.

And Babette, in her humbled and martyred, heart, was deeply and mysteriously happy.

CHAPTER XX

TOM CUNNINGHAM found the letter propped up on his bureau the next evening. Her slanting, tall handwriting gave him a little sense of vertigo; he never could see Babette's handwriting unmoved. His big hand shook as he took the letter, dropped into a chair, ripped open the envelope deliberately. Here it was—in his hands—the letter she had promised him—the thing he had been living for——

There were pages—pages. Tom felt an instinctive bewilderment, holding them. Usually she was so brief——

The letter began:

Tom, my dearest, when you read this I will be once more with my husband—with Jean's father. It is only for her sake. Max Newman is leaving for the East to-day, and I go with him, to be gone for several weeks. Believe me——

"Oh, my God—my God—my God!" Tom said, in a loud whisper, with long pauses between the words. He sat fixed, the crumpled sheets convulsedly held in his big hands. "Oh, my God!" he said in a loud whisper again. "Oh, Babette—my little girl—they didn't get you, after all?"

Then for a long time he did not move.

Some time later he went quietly down the back stairway and out of the side door into the dusky summer street, where furtive gritty breezes were stirring. One of the maids reported to Mollie that Mr. Tom had gone out, and Mollie looked vaguely surprised and distressed.

"Is it late, then?" she asked, rousing herself from the dreamy state to which a fairy tale, read aloud by Ellen to Paul, had reduced her.

"Soup's on the table, Mommy," said Peter. "Did you say Tom went out, Annie?"

"Yes, sir. He just went by Lizzie and I," Annie reported. "Lizzie was rollin' the little butter balls——"

"Well, come on, he'll be back," Mollie said, comfortably.

But it was many a long day before Tom came back.

Kate, however, saw him an hour or two later. She was just closing the Library, after a singularly quiet evening, when she jumped nervously to discover her cousin standing near her and staring at her with peculiarly bright, glittering eyes in an ashen face.

"Scare you?" Tom asked, hoarsely, after clearing his throat, and with an attempt at a smile.

"No, but what is it? Somebody sick?" the girl asked, quickly.

"Everything fine," he answered. "I just wanted to speak to you. Closing up?"

Kate, instead of responding, rapidly disposed of a lingering reader or two, jerked off the dangling lights between the grimy bookcases, made a brief survey of the storeroom, where the kettle had been known to burn dry overnight, over a forgotten gas jet, slammed blotters and pencils into her desk drawer, and put on her hat.

Tom meanwhile stood at the big street window, looking out. When she touched his arm he started, and they went out together, Kate locking the door behind her.

"Tommy darling, what is it?" she pleaded then, terrified by his aspect.

He seized her arm; walked her rapidly and blindly ahead. He was breathing strangely, and Kate caught an odour about him that she had never detected on Tom before. Something wild, disordered, something for which she confusedly found the word "coarse" frightened and puzzled her in his manner.

"Listen," he said, convulsedly, "I'll tell you! Listen a minute——"

He suffocated. Kate was hurried along beside him.

"Tom, where have you been? What have you been doing?"

"I've been walking—I don't know where. I've just been—walking," he said, quickly and unevenly, in a loud, breezy voice. "Kate," he said, breathlessly, "I've had a letter from

her, and she says she's gone back to her husband. I don't believe it. I don't believe it for a minute, so *that's* all right. But —but—but here, you read it," he broke off, feverishly jumbling some crumpled sheets of paper into Kate's hand in the darkness of the streets; "you'll see that she just wrote it to scare me—they made her, they're all after her. He wants the kid, do you see, Kate? That's all she cares about—she'd seen him in hell before she—— I know *that*, she's told me that a thousand times!—— Oh, my God, my God, my God!" he cried, in a sort of terrified wail, covering his eyes with a quick gesture of the back of his hand. "I'm kind of knocked in the head, Kate," he added, in a quiet, reassuring voice, catching her arm once more, and hurrying her along. "You'll have to excuse me. The husband is a beast—a low Jew, that's what he is—everyone knows that. She could no more go back to him than you could. I *know* it! But you see I telephoned her father's house, and they said she wasn't there. Probably out with her brother—George Garberg; he's a nice kid. And then I telephoned—I telephoned to the husband, Max Newman. He lives with an aunt of his, a Mrs. Napthaly, and she said that he'd gone East, 'with Mrs. Newman.' So you see—he's married again. I'll bet you any money, Kate, I'll bet a thousand dollars to one that it isn't Babette—— Listen, Kate, *listen*, Kate——"

"Tom, dear, you're all worked up about it, and you're not well," Kate said, tenderly. "Try to be reasonable, dear. You didn't have any dinner, did you?"

"They've all gotten at her, and scared her about Jean," Tom said, quietly, quite without hearing her. "If I'd been there, it never would have happened. Now where are we? Pierce and O'Farrell. Where's the nearest telephone station? I'll try her again, and if it's a possible thing, I'll take the nine-forty-five boat to Ross. It'll all be cleared up. What I meant to say to you was this, Kate. Don't let my father and mother, and all the—— Oh, damn them, damn them!—They talked her out of it!" he interrupted himself, on a great dry sob. "Don't let my father and mother talk you and John out of it," he went on, suddenly rational and confidential again. "They will, you

know. Older people—they have no guts. It's all a question of rent and religion with them!"

"Tom, will you come back with me to your house, and just lie down—you'll be ill—you *are* ill——"

"She hasn't done it, because she wouldn't let that skunk put a finger-tip on her, much less—" Tom said, his mouth suddenly dry—"much less shut herself up in a hotel room with him. Her little suitcase—her little things—oh, my God! There's the cemetery. Lord, what bright moonlight on those old eucalyptus," he observed, conversationally, once more suddenly collecting himself, "which way are we going? No, she hasn't done it," he repeated, "but if she has, it's my father's doing, and of course I'll kill myself."

"Tom, what a silly, schoolboy way to talk!" But Kate was quivering from head to foot.

"Do you think I could live, knowing that he had her, Kate? Going in and out of her room, watching her pour his coffee—— You must be a good deal of a fool if you do! I opened the letter —I thought it would say something about plans—— Here we are. I'll join you in a minute——"

They were indeed in sight of the Turk Street cottage. Kate caught at his arm.

"But come in, Tom—— Ah, please! There's nobody home but Grandma. Uncle Harry's got a night-watchman's job, and John left yesterday for Los Angeles. Aunt Maggie's making Cecy a dress, and she said if she got working late she'd stay and have dinner with your mother."

"I'll come back in five minutes." He detached her hold on his arm, lifted his hat with an air, and walked rapidly away. Kate stood at the gate.

"Tom!" she called, suddenly, fearfully. She took a quick step after him, turned back.

Let him walk it off. Poor, frantic, desperate Tom, exercise and fatigue would do more for him than any words of hers could do. She went soberly into the house.

CHAPTER XXI

TEN days later Kate told her aunt that she and John were planning a quiet wedding in September.

Mollie listened apathetically; she was not concerned in Kate's plans now. She had been ill, was up again, and could go to church, could move heavily, sadly, about the big, shaded house.

In Paul's room there were toys, blocks, story books. Ellen still played with him, alert eyes on her mother; Martin's ingenuity with "Holy Joe" was exercised tirelessly, but in lowered tones. There were strange silences in the house; it seemed empty, haunted. Sometimes Allie's and Mollie's voices, droning in the upstairs rooms, sounded oddly like sobbing.

The stricken mother drooped visibly before their eyes. When Peter, himself suddenly aged and grey, agreed with the doctor that the Lake was the place for them all, Mollie consented dully to move. But she took no part in the preparations.

Her beautiful Daisy's death had been laid as an offering at God's feet, as had the death of that shadowy baby who preceded Daisy. Tom's absence in Paris she had borne. Cecy's unfortunate love affair had been weathered. Paul's cruel accident, shaking her philosophy and faith to their roots, was nevertheless now a part of life, a cross, a "trile," with at least no bitterness and no ugliness about it.

But the complete disappearance of her first-born child touched her reason. The supposition was that Tom had shipped on some seagoing vessel, and was halfway to Australia or China now. But all Peter's cautious investigating unearthed no proof. Tom was gone.

His mother was unable to rally from the blow. She carried her heart like a bleeding thing in her breast, and dragged from

the innermost depths of her being great hitching sighs that tore at her physically, before she could bring herself to utter even one of the lifeless brevities that were her only conversation in these days.

"What did you say, dear?"

"Oh, Mama, darling! If you knew how we are all praying about it!" It might be Cecy weeping, embracing her, interrupting her languid progress from one room to another. "Tom's a big, strong man, Mama—nothing can happen to him! For Papa's sake, for *all* our sakes, *can't* you just trust in God?"

In vain. Mollie would brush the comforter aside. There was no solace anywhere. But Cecy had mysteriously found her own soul again, won by suffering and sympathy, and was once more her father's angelic little guide, and a very example of holiness and sweetness.

Cecy was to be Kate's bridesmaid. The engagement had been duly printed under "Other Social Events" in the newspapers, and Kate wore a ring. Aunt Mollie, Aunt Maggie, the uncles, had all quite enthusiastically accepted their part of the plan; Kate, after her agonies of renunciation, was bewildered almost to the point of resentment at their adaptability.

"You'd think they'd never made a scene when I talked about getting married last spring!" she said to John.

"Well, exactly," John answered, shrugging. "Do a thing, and everyone admires you. Give it up, and pretty soon they are all despising you."

Dark days for Mollie and Peter, lonely and heroic ones for Cecy, yet these were exquisite times for John and Kate.

The girl lived in a dream. Her destiny seemed to be brilliant to the point of unreality. For *her*—shabby, hard-working, dish-washing Kate Walsh!—the new frocks, the new hats, the new trunk with its pleasant reedy smell, the new cards with the engraved new name, the sun-flooded apartment in Van Ness Avenue, far down near the military post on the bay. These were all so much bewildering glory added to the central fact: that this big, strong, gentle man loved her, wanted to make her his wife, always—for ever and for ever, to be near her. That he

could kiss her now, could press her head back, and rest his face against hers, and grip her in his forceful arms while he whispered: "Kate, do you love me?"

Hundreds of men were marrying hundreds of women every year. Why should this one union seem fraught with such heart-stopping miracles? Why should Kate almost suffocate when she thought of the wedding morning, the Mass, the breakfast, the hour when she and John should go off into the autumn sunshine together? Mr. and Mrs. John Rose Kelly. They would go to Del Monte, and it would be so written upon the register: Mr. and Mrs. John Rose Kelly. A bell-boy would carry their suitcases upstairs——

"I'll have a wedding breakfast for you, Kate," Mollie promised her, drearily.

"Oh, Aunt Mollie—you don't want to! We can——"

"No, no, what's the big house for? My own don't use it. It isn't good enough for Cecy and Tom!" Mollie pursued, bitterly, wearily. "Only don't have too many, dear."

"Oh, darling!" Kate was kissing her. "Nobody but ourselves!"

"What an idea!" Mollie roused herself to say, with heavy gentle reproach. "No, dear, say forty or fifty."

"Forty or fifty!" Kate's beautiful blue eyes flashed with excitement. "Oh, but, Aunt Mollie, could Lizzie—would you have to have extra maids in?"

"What do you think we'd have to do? Isn't there such a thing as caterers?" Mollie demanded, with a pale echo of her old superbness. Kate and Allie exchanged impressed glances. Caterers!

"Leave her do it, she's grievin' her heart out for Tom, and it'll distract her," Allie said to Kate, later. "I never see anybody mourn the way Mollie'll do. I said to your Aunt Maggie that I don't know what more'd be left to her, if his dead body should be brought home dead to her, the way she acts about Tom! Grief takes her terrible hard, for all she'll rarely let a sound out of her. She's like poor old Mrs. Moore when her son come back that was killed in the Klondike—didn't he walk in on her

five years after all the Masses they'd had said for his soul—for he was very wild, without being what you'd call vicious in any ways whatsoever——" rambled Allie. "And she as cool as kiss your hand!" she concluded, obscurely, "and all she says was, 'Shut the door behind you, Joe.' I thought Alice Moore would drop on me when she told me."

The return from the Lake was early this year, and the entire family forces rallied in the big Cunningham house in Howard Street for Kate's wedding. It was going to be such a simple wedding, and yet, as the months narrowed to weeks, and the weeks to days, there seemed to be such overwhelming details to settle.

This was perhaps partly because nobody did anything completely, or with anything like dispatch or finality. Maggie was to speak to the priest, and forgot all about it. Mollie was to have a long talk with the caterer, and kept putting it off. Allie was supposedly superintending the modest trousseau, and Allie's dilatoriness was proverbial.

Boxes arrived. Kate and Cecy, in their petticoats, and fresh from the endless trying-on of half-made clothes, flew excitedly out into the upper hall, and interrogated the maids, as the boxes were carried upstairs.

"Who's it for, Aggie?"

"It's for Miss Kate, from Schonwasser's."

"Oh, that's the collars, Cecy! Thanks, Aggie."

"Kate!" Maggie would call, from the big room next to Paul's that was used as a sewing room now. "Come back here while I see will this lay good on your shoulders!"

"Katie!" That was Paul's high, imperious little voice. "Let me see! What was it?"

"It was nothing for you, lover. Or wait—we did get him something, didn't we, Cecy? It was a box for perfume, and we thought it would make a fine quilted little bed for Holy Joe!"

The sewing room was a litter of scraps, lengths of embroidery, fashion books, half-finished garments.

"I suppose if I had any sense I'd make this an elastic belt in

your good dress. God knows where you'll be this time six months! Stand still, Kate, or the blade'll run into you——"

"Look at her blush!"

"Blush? It would make a horse blush!"

"That wrinkle will come out when it's pressed. It fits good now, don't it, Mollie?"

"Ain't any of you going to have any lunch? Lizzie says it was ready, dear knows how long back. Leave your hair go, Maggie, and come down like you are. It's just us."

"Did you speak to Uncle Peter about asking the Crowleys, Aunt Mollie?"

"What did you say, dear?"

"You know we weren't sure about the Crowleys."

Kate kept lists, everyone kept lists. People to thank for presents, people to ask to the wedding, other people to be bidden to the house; flowers, palms—remember to bring suitcase to Aunt Mollie's house before wedding.

"Stamps," Kate said, seriously, to John, on the eve of the great day. He had found one of her lists, and was consulting it with her.

"You darling!" he muttered, laughing and confused. "What for?"

"Well!" She had turned scarlet. "They said they mightn't have them for sale at the hotels—and I'll have to write letters——"

"Oh, you *darling!* Kate, if only you don't die before tomorrow, my dearest." His arms were about her, he was gently tumbling the beautiful golden-brown ripple of her hair. "Kate, dearest, do you love me?"

She said "yes," laughing. She had been laughing all day, in the desperate last whirl. The house was decorated now, and the church chancel set with palms and flowers. Music had been "arranged." The Fallons, forgotton until the last minute, had been pacified. Mollie's dress was on a hanger, Grandma's new dress had been carried home to her, Allie and Maggie were wearing their eyes out, nervously plunging through the last stages of Cecy's and Kate's dresses.

Some things were packed, some were still unfinished. Kate was not supposed to see John at all to-day, and there they were talking downstairs in the hall.

"They might as well stay to dinner, I suppose, since they're here?" Peter suggested, and Cecy, hating to lose one minute of Kate, added eagerly: "It's just a pick-up dinner, Mama, and Annie says it's ready any time."

"No, I don't like that," Mollie said, wearily and anxiously. "She ought to have gone earlier, she was to have her last supper quietly at home with Grandma."

"Aunt Maggie needed her for fitting!" contributed Ellen.

"Never mind then, Mama, Jawn'll take her home," Peter assured his wife, soothingly.

"No; that won't do either," Mollie persisted, fretfully. "She oughtn't to see Jawn at all to-day. I don't know what's come to the girls, the way they run around with no modesty at all to them! Her and him were fixing the flowers——"

"The Haleys are here, just to see her presents, and they'll take her home," Cecy interposed, diplomatically. "And it isn't as if it was anything but a little wedding, Mama—just a breakfast really."

"The first wedding in the house, Pete, and my boy—that I would have give my life for——" Mollie faltered, in tears.

Kate, approaching to bid them a weary, grateful, excited, confused good-night, saw that the moment was inopportune, and departed.

"Say, Kate, come in and have breakfast with us to-morrow!" Mart called after her, from the confusion of step-ladder and greens in which he laboured.

She paused, radiant, young, weary, all girl in her laughter, and yet all woman in the swift look that met John's eyes before it went to Mart.

"Well, I will if I *can*——" she hesitated. "But I have a date at nine o'clock!"

The Haleys, two good middle-aged sisters who had a millinery store in Fillmore Street, were delighted to escort her home, and

make the kindly duty an excuse for stepping in to visit old Mrs. Walsh, upon the very eve of the great occasion. Kate stopped on her way, this last night of her girlhood, to buy fresh spongy bread at the grocery, and figs, and a can of corn.

The Angelus was ringing through the mellow autumn dusk when they came to the dingy kitchen. After the windy, chilly summer, a little interval of peace and warmth had come to the grey city, and the steady apricot glow in the west promised Kate a golden wedding day. Her own long shadow went before her over the splintered door-sill across which she had taken her first staggering baby steps into the big world.

Her grandmother was in the kitchen, crooning like an old sorceress over the preparation of coffee and eggs for Harry. Harry had a night-watchman's job at the moment, and consequently slept all afternoon. Mrs. Walsh, and Maggie too, had a perverse fancy for twilight, for puttering about with straining eyes and inaccurate fingers in the dusk, and Kate's first move to-night, as usually, was to flash on the lights.

An aged friend of her grandmother, the Widow Regan, was now discovered sitting quietly by the table, her dingy veil falling ineffectually about a florid, square, weather-beaten old face, and the worn alpaca that clothed her enormous form embellished by a large china miniature of a Murillo Madonna, in the shape of a brooch.

Kate, as the other four women all peacefully seated themselves and regarded her amiably, began to snap strings, to rattle pans, and jerk faucets on and off. The conversation began with greetings.

"Well, Hannah," said old Mrs. Walsh, repressively, to the elder Haley. "Well, Annie."

"Well, Kate," said Mrs. Regan.

"Where's Maggie?" demanded Maggie's mother. "She has a right to fix his supper for Harry."

"She's finishing up my wedding dress, I'll have you know, Mrs. Walsh!" sang, rather than said, Kate.

"So you're goin' to lose your good name, Kate, as they say,"

Mrs. Regan contributed, in a deep male voice. "That's what my own good mother always used to say. 'Well, you're goin' to lose your good name,' she'd say to this one and that."

"Well, I get a dandy!" Kate, pulling the kettle forward, and slamming stove plates, returned cheerfully. "Kelly. Can you beat it? John says that whenever he's in a strange town and wants to talk to somebody he walks to the nearest clergy-house and asks, 'Is my cousin Father Kelly in?'"

"I didn't know he had a cousin that was a priest, did you, Annie?" asked the elder Haley, innocently.

"Pure bone, fortified with the best Portland cement," Kate commented, affectionately, laying her glowing cheek for an instant against Hannah Haley's grizzled, wrinkled, freckled brow.

"My sister married a man named Kelly, and wasn't she wed and out of the house before I was born at all?" Mrs. Regan said. "There was a fine old lady come to the marriage, and she says to my poor mother, God rest her, 'She'll have the weddin' of a duchess,' she says, 'and the death of a saint!' Manny's the time my ould mother's tolt me of it; it was a week to the day that I was born. 'And you kickin' the life and all out of me,' she'd say, savin' your presence, ger'rls, 'the way I thought you'd be born in the house before I could get home!'

"An' my sister Moira, that was married that Easter Monda'," she continued, "had the consumption come on her wit' the stren'th of the very serious sickness that was in it, after her second one come, an' it was death touched her, an' well she knew it! And I two years old at her funeral, yellin' that my mother'd give me some barley sticks they had there to pacify the young little children. Two infants she left behind her—that one."

"There's manny goes that way, with the consumption on them," Mrs. Walsh commented, in a dreamy silence.

"Mrs. Regan, how do you have it?" Kate asked, at the teapot.

"Are you fixin' a cup of tea for me, dear? Put a taste of sugar in it, Kate, and a sup of milk. God bless us, I ought to of

been home this hour back! But you know Mamie's in the hospital——"

"Mamie is?" It was one of the Haleys questioning. The Haleys liked to know everything about everybody, and never missed a crumb of information. For months, selling seven-dollar hats, putting crookedly lettered signs "Choice, $2.50" in their dusty little shop window, they would murmur about the night before Kate Walsh married John Kelly, when old Mrs. Regan was over to Walshes'.

"Mamie had a miss yesterday morning, and they run her into the hospital, and they don't know will she live or not," Mamie's grandmother enlarged, dispassionately.

"Mamie Riley?"

"Oh, my, she was terrible ill with the sickness that took her," the harsh old voice continued. "They anointed her for death, but she didn't die on them, and to-night Willie come in, lookin' like a corpse that'd sit up in the casket itself, and he says she had a chanct that maybe she'll live. I was just tellin' Mrs. Walsh."

"For the love of Mike!" Hannah Haley whispered, shocked. "Did her mother come up from Santa Cruz?"

"Kitty? Yes, she's here. She left Benedict—that's her third boy, that's pushin' twenty now, with the arm he bruk crankin' Joe's car—all done up in a boondle as big as a watermelon or what not," Mrs. Regan said.

"And Mamie sick in the hospital——" Hannah mused. "My, ain't it terrible what children cost people!"

"Oh, they're a heartscald from the day your clothes begins to feel tight on you," the great-grandmother, eighty years old, stated, dispassionately. "Mamie have two, an' yet not twenty-four, and Willie says she's bawlin' the hear'rt out of her that she'd lose this little unborn one that hasn't ever come yet!"

The peaceful sipping of tea followed. Kate ate little, drank the hot thin drink gratefully, dreamed of to-morrow. Behind her confused thoughts of invitations, of all the engagements and obligations of the day, floated always the glimmer of the wedding gown, the perfectly practical and simple white silk,

"that she can wear to rags afterwards," Maggie reiterated, that was yet so sumptuous when offset by the white shoes and stockings, the collar of real lace that belonged to Kate's shadowy, long-dead mother, and Aunt Mollie's delicate white veil. Then real orange blossoms, fragrant, stocky, thick little creamy-yellow blooms whose waves of oily perfume would always mean to her the September day of her wedding. These to be in rosettes at the temples. And delicate, fresh underthings of palest pink, even the new stays, all run cunningly with faintly pinker ribbons. And the new suitcase, and within it the new blue taffeta wrapper embellished with little ruffles, and tiny pink roses, and crinkled rows of creamy lace. "In case you'd have breakfast upstairs in your room," Mollie had murmured as if casually, bringing the scarlet to Kate's face and making her heart hammer with happy fear.

Some of these things were laid out neatly in her room, that shabby cottage room that she had shared with Aunt Maggie all her happy, sunny, impetuous life. Others were at Aunt Mollie's. The characteristic detail of Aunt Maggie still slaving, late into the actual wedding eve, upon the wedding garment, entirely escaped Kate. It had never occurred to her that Aunt Maggie was responsible for the chronic last-moment hurrying and straining.

Harry, nicely shaved and brushed, came into the kitchen for a hurried meal, and went importantly upon his way. If he possibly could manage it he would be at the church the next morning at nine o'clock to see Kate married, he promised. "But business first," Harry said.

"I feel sorry for the men," Hannah Haley, who did more honest work every week than Harry had ever done in his life, commented, admiringly. "You don't drink tea, Mr. Walsh?"

"Sometimes," Harry answered, condescendingly. "But you can't go to sleep on my job!"

Kate, who had interrupted her own desultory meal to prepare and serve his, put the eggy plates and pans to soak, and reseated herself when he was gone. Her dreams went on, through the quiet conversation of her elders. She saw John, tall, dark,

pale under his summer brown, standing at the end of the long aisle, against the background of lighted altar and the drooping fingers of the palms, waiting for his wife——

"Who's standin' up with Jawn?" Mrs. Regan suddenly demanded, setting down the saucer from which she had just enjoyed a luxurious draught.

"Joe Prendergast—Doctor Joe, it is now!"

"Them Prendergasts have been the unfortunate ones," Mrs. Regan commented, shaking her head. "Nine, she had—and three tuk away in the coorse of two years! Lily's baby was born the night Dan died, and they said that Minnie sat wit' the tears drippin' into the face of the poor young boy, that wasn't an hour old, and the face of him like lard itself. Lily has poor-lookin' children, but sure they all grow up as har'rd as heathens. 'Oh,' she says, but very whisht, mind you, that Lily wouldn't hear her, and have a convulsion on them like Rita done, 'Oh,' she says to the poor infant, 'there's life and death in this house to-night!' she says."

"Speaking of Rita reminds me of Rita Malotti, that married the Eyetalian—you remember the girl that lived in Chico that I was telling you me and Annie made all the clothes for when she got married?" Hannah Haley contributed. "Didn't she have twins at the Caseys' awhile back. She run over to see Grandma Casey, and Mrs. Casey says, 'Rita, what do you want for Christmas?' It seems it was Christmas Eve. Well, Daisy Casey was there, and she's a great one for humour, she's as comical as a bag of monkeys, and she give Rita a look, and she says, 'I think she wants a calendar—looks to me as if she has no business out of her own house just now!' and with that Daisy laughed. Well, it seems that Malotti, the Eyetalian she married, come in just then—her mother was staying with them, and she sent him over to Caseys' to bring Rita home—and he says, 'I'm fired. *I've* got to get a job for Christmas!' And Daisy says that Rita stood up, and she looked kind of queer, and wasn't the twins born that very night, in Grandma Casey's own bed.

"And oh, she's having a terrible time with the both of them,"

the narrator continued, sighing. "There's one has the rickets, and the doctor says that if that one dies, as like as not the other one will, too. And the older child, the girl, is a very delicate creature."

A silence. Kate piled cups, thrust wood in under the cooling kettle, stood listening at the sink.

"I suppose poor Tom Cunningham would of stood up wit' Jawn Kelly if he'd been here," Annie Haley ventured.

"John said so. I think it's just one more blow to my Aunt Mollie."

"Poor Mollie, them children has been a terrible heartscald to her. Paul a cripple, and Ellen as wild as a hawk," summarized Mrs. Regan, "and the priests writin' her twice that they'd fire Mart out of their school, for the wildness of insubordination that's on him, and then Tom walkin' out! And Cecilia, that was goin' to be a nun; whatever happened that she lost her vocation, and begun to run with them society people? Don't I remember the mother, Mollie," the old woman continued, "the night before she was married to Pete Cunningham, that was makin' five hundred a month, they said. My, the pretty, happy ger'rl she was—she looked somethin' like Katie here, before she begun to put on flesh. But Kate's hands and feet is bigger. And the next time I come to this house," she added, impressively, "the good man himself was laid out dead in that room that Maggie and Kate has now. My daughter Kitty have his death-card to this day—I seen it when her grandchild dropped everything out of her prayerbook last Sunday at eight o'clock. The whole pew was full of holy pictures and death-cards."

Kate was winding the dimmed nickel alarm clock.

"Grandma, shall I set it for seven? Uncle Pete is to send the car for you and Aunt Maggie and me at half-past eight, and there won't be any breakfast fuss. We'll all be fasting. Half-past seven will be early enough, won't it?"

"You can't wait to get into his ar'rms, can you, Kate?" Mrs. Regan commented, good-humouredly. "This time to-

morrow night we'll not be hearin' so much out of you!" she predicted, with a shrewd smiling glance.

The three elderly virgins, for Maggie had come in now, with the wedding dress in a large cardboard box, laughed a little self-consciously at this, and Kate turned her back squarely upon the room, and devoted herself to the dishpan. The very lobes of her ears, close-set under the loosened chestnut rings of hair, turned pink in the scarlet flood of colour that enveloped her.

She swashed the mud-coloured rag conscientiously about the discoloured tin pie-pans and the nicked cups; rinsed the glazed brown teapot that was sometimes washed but never empty; disappeared into the backyard to rap the rim of a laden saucepan against the disreputable garbage barrel; put away clean china, still hot and smooth to the touch; jiggled the matches back into their paper box; brushed the floor.

And all the time, under the drifting talk of marriage, birth, and death, the exquisite dream floated before her eyes, the vision of the white gown that could be worn to rags afterwards; the blue taffeta wrapper that a wife might wear, should she and her husband breakfast upstairs; the nightgown so delicately embroidered and frail; the new trunk with its good clean odour of varnish and new wood, and the church aisle where a darkly glowing, tremblingly reverent young man would be waiting for his wife at nine o'clock to-morrow morning.

"We'll see you to-morrow, Kate, but you won't see us," said the Haleys, at about half-past nine, making half-hearted preparations for departure. The Haleys had said this to every bride who ever bought a wedding hat of them. They were going to the church, of course, but they appreciated perfectly that they did not as friends rank quite intimately enough to be further bidden to the house. "Meanwhile, we'll run up to church here and say a little prayer for you."

"You'll be angels if you will!" Kate responded, gratefully, kissing them.

But still the elderly women lingered talking. Kate pondered as she fussed and rinsed, half listening, half smiling. She was

going to be married to-morrow. She was going to be married to-morrow.

Catherine Walsh Kelly. She had told John that she never picked up a newspaper in the morning without seeing that some unfortunate Kate Kelly had been arrested for drunkenness or disturbing the peace, but she liked her new name none the less. She would be Mrs. Kelly.

It was wonderful to be young, and going to be married! Kate, soberly washing dishes, would not have changed places with any woman in the world to-night. She felt a great pity and love in her heart for these other women, unmarried women, widows, elderly women for whom all the glory and flash and glow of life was ended.

Her hands smelled of dish-water, coffee grounds. She went to the washroom, off the back porch, and returned with a slip of perfumed soap and a brush, still listening to the others, as she scrubbed and soaped busily under the hot-water tap.

"'I never seen a corpse with a nose-bleed in all the days of me life before!'" Mrs. Regan was quoting some physician solemnly. "'Well, doctor,' she says, 'a nose-bleed he has, and that's the long and short of it!' An' wit' that, Nelly run——"

"For heaven's sakes——" Maggie murmured, impressed.

"Well, Mamie Cotrelly's child was delivered, and she dead——" one of the Haleys added, in a low tone, with a cautious glance at Kate's back.

Kate fell to vague thoughts of motherhood. How did one know it was approaching? Was the agony so frightful? Was there a real danger of a bride's immediately becoming a delicate, handicapped burden? Did men stop loving women if sickness and little babies and nerves and helplessness began too soon? She mused, a little apprehensive, but all curious, all eager for life. Could a few weeks or months actually make Kate Walsh anything less than the sound, healthy, vitally living and radiant creature that she was to-night?

"Well, we'll see you in the morning, but you won't see us, Kate," said Annie Haley. It was just then, as the three callers were actually about to go, that a large soft bundle fell, or was

propelled against the outer kitchen door, where three chipped and splintering steps led down to the yard, and that a thick voice was heard saying: "You leave me be, and I'll leave *you* be!"

Mrs. Walsh gave a thin little familiar wail, and a look of sudden intelligence leaped into Maggie's eyes. Kate set her teeth, put her arms akimbo, and made a tutting sound with her tongue.

"Oh, and he said he'd surely be all right for my wedding!" she lamented, less angry and surprised than simply regretful.

"We'll slip out the front way!" whispered the visitors, entirely comprehending and lightly stepping into the front hall.

"Oh, my—my—my, it's Charley, they've got him again, just as he was workin' so good!" muttered Mrs. Walsh. "Turn his bed down, Maggie, and come here, Kate, and lend me the loan of a hand with the poor feller!"

"I'll start him some coffee," Kate said. She did not see the heavy form she presently helped to push and pull into the bedroom, she did not smell the evil breath, or feel the clutch of the hot, misdirected hands.

The world for her was all blue taffeta, white satin, filmy veils, and fragrant orange blossoms. In spirit she was at the church, in the cool sweetness and silence of a dreaming September morning. She was following the pink organdie and poke bonnet that was Cecy, she was tightening her white-gloved hand upon the comforting solid arm of kindly, fatherly Uncle Peter.

She was going slowly, slowly, surely, toward the dark, pale, eager man at the altar. To John Kelly, waiting for his wife.

CHAPTER XXII

SOMETIMES the swift passage of the months, the terrible months that so quickly made years, frightened Cecilia Cunningham. The little-girl years, thirteen, fifteen, sixteen, had seemed so long, one was so eternally a junior, admiring one's older Cousin Kate for her seniority of thirteen months—coaxing to go to the Orpheum—too young for the hotel dances, in Mama's opinion!

Now suddenly, violently, one was twenty-one, twenty-three, twenty-five. The Christmases flew by, with women congratulating each other in the crowded shops upon the floods of golden western sunshine; the Easters seemed to touch one another, with Saint Mary's all stalky lilies and twinkling candles, and sweet-scented, swooning heat. The Cunninghams went to the Lake, they returned for September shopping; the deluging rains began. And presently it was Cecy's birthday again.

Paul had birthdays, too—was ten, eleven. There was an operation, attended with novenas and the lighting of blessed candles, there was the gradual slow slipping of strength and colour.

Cecy was lovely at twenty-five, still rosy, her healthy firm cheeks still delicately peppered with golden freckles. She went downtown for her mother, returned with packages, reports, a surprise for Paul. She went to girls' card parties, and won prizes. She was an ideal big sister to little Ellen, when Ellen came home from her convent boarding-school for vacations, and she was angelically tender and patient with Paul.

Upon Kate she called almost every morning, and the cousins chatted desultorily across the great gulf that divided them. Kate was thinner now, more beautiful than ever in the agony and delight of young motherhood. Kate's whole being flamed like a sacrificial altar before the needs of her babies. She wore

big crash aprons, she tested bath-water with a dipped bare elbow, she tasted lukewarm bottles with a faint doubtful frown.

She and John were building a big house in Saint Francis Wood, a house full of porcelain bathtubs and clean new wood and sparkling big windows that gave upon a foggy ocean. Kate and Cecy went out to inspect it, between nursings, taking young Frank, in his white coat and buttoned gaiters. Frank was a beautiful child, the baby Jimmy was a fat gurgling double-chinned baby; Kate said, with her rich laugh, that she wished the new baby wasn't coming *quite* so soon; it didn't seem quite fair to Jimmy to push him out of his place yet awhile.

"Kate, you with three! But it doesn't seem possible! It seems yesterday that you were married," Cecy would say.

But she was not thinking of Kate. Years meant nothing to Kate, absorbed, beloved, building a home, bearing children. It was to Cecy, the ideal sister and daughter, that the flying of time was cruel. Why didn't her life come to her, her own life? When would that begin?

Sometimes she quarrelled with Mart, and sometimes was captious with her mother. "Oh, what's the difference?" Cecy would plaintively murmur, with an impatient stress upon the last word, when her mother adroitly coaxed her into getting new clothes, going to parties.

Most of the time, however, she was merry, cheerful, coming in from city journeys full of chatter, quite the life of the staid luncheon table, where Maggie still wore her dangling dressmaker's pincushion pinned to her maiden breast, where Allie detained the waitress with asides regarding Paul's tray, and where tempered light still streamed in through drawn wooden shutters and looped red curtains.

"Will you ever forget the day Tom swallered the fishbone, Mollie?"

"Oh, God help us—wasn't that a day?"

"Oh, and I met Stan Thornton, down on Kearney Street," Cecy might say suddenly. "And he says that Gertrude has a little boy, born last night."

"For heaven's sakes, how long have they been married?"

It might be Allie, Maggie, or Mollie, it might even be Grace Nolan, the old servant, who involuntarily asked the question, as she passed the rolls.

"Well, that's what I thought! But it was Christmas a year ago, Mama, when you come to think about it."

And Cecy would think of the years again. Twenty-five, almost twenty-six. At twenty-six life would practically be over, one was an old maid then.

"Hello, is it you, Cecilia? I asked for you, dear, because I didn't want to frighten your dear mama. This is Sister Mary Baptist, Cecilia, and I only wanted to say that we are a little worried about Ellen, and I was wondering if you could come over and see her this afternoon? Or perhaps Mama would come, if you can manage it without alarming her. Doctor Costello has just been here, and he says there is absolutely nothing alarming about it, but Good Mother thought that perhaps I had better telephone you."

"Oh, Sister, tell me the truth! Is Ellen seriously ill?" Cecy's hand, holding the receiver, shook with sheer fright. "My father and mother are at church, and then they were going out to the hospital to see my little brother," she said, wildly. "But I could get them, I know! I could send my brother Martin——"

"No, no, no, dear; there's no occasion. It's merely that Ellen isn't very well, and feels just a little lonely. How is the dear little brother?" pursued the nun's smooth voice, carried by telephone from the peaceful suburban town twelve miles away, where Ellen had been a boarder for almost two years.

"Paul?" Sorrow came into Cecy's own young voice. "He's not so well, Sister. They've been trying the new treatment, you know, but he doesn't seem to have gained very much. They think now that he's better at home, and my father's going to have him brought home on Thursday."

"We are all praying for him," said the nun, sympathetically, and tears came into Cecy's eyes as she answered gratefully:

"Oh, thank you, Sister."

She turned away from the telephone solemn with new responsibility. Martin—where was Martin? The Cunningham family had lately come to feel that nothing could be done without Martin.

There was pleasant Sunday order and a spring silence and airiness throughout the empty house. Aunt Allie with Peter and Mollie had gone to "High," the maids were murmuring over chickens to be cleaned and ice to be packed, far downstairs. Martin was whistling softly upstairs, in his own room.

With a slight, not all unpleasant, sense of strangeness and fear upon them, the brother and sister scribbled a reassuring word for Mollie, left cautionary messages with the maids, and went forth together into the sharp April airs. The convent was across the bay, almost an hour's trip. It was windy and cool in the city, but there were only faint warm breezes stirring on the water, and the country, splashed to-day with languid satiny poppies and masses of varnished buttercups tall in the tall wheat, was balmy and sweet. Cecy's face grew flushed as they walked the half-mile to the convent garden, and Martin carried her coat.

Martin was not so romantically handsome as Tom had been. But he was tall, attractive, and honest looking, and he had the blue Cunningham eyes. Cecy, introducing him in the dustless coolness and spaciousness of the echoing parlour, was proud of him.

"But you're never the bad boy that climbed into our old oak, and frightened the wits out of our girls in retreat?" merry little Sister Mary Baptist asked him, smiling up at him through glasses. "Dear, dear, how you children grow up! Cecilia, you know Doctor Costello? Now, Doctor, you tell these good children that there is nothing in the world to be alarmed about in Ellen's case, and I'll go up and tell the young lady that she has callers."

Certainly Cecy remembered Robert Costello, the dark, big, serious man, who had been Tom's friend and classmate years ago. But what was he doing over here? Didn't he still live in the city, with his aunt?

Yes, but his aunt was spending a month at the hotel, and he was with her, he explained. The regular convent physician was ill. Cecy remembered then that the old aunt was enormously wealthy, and "queer." She had seen her husband and sons drown before her eyes, "or something," Cecy recalled vaguely. Doctor Robert was her idol, he was to have all her money, on condition that he did not marry in her lifetime. Cecy had an impression that he was rather a harsh, cold, almost diabolically clever young surgeon.

"Weren't you camping last summer, up near Tahoe?" she asked. "It seems to me somebody told Mama that your aunt and you were there?"

"Yes, I know just where your camp is." He said it so grimly, so dispassionately that Cecy, with a little inward indignation, decided that she wouldn't offer him an opportunity for a snub with any suggestion of interchanged visits. "We're four miles further up, on the Truckee road," he said. "I wish—I'd like to ride over some day," he went on, a little awkwardly, "and see —see that little brother of yours——"

"He's just awkward; that old witch of an aunt has scared him of girls," Cecy decided, compassionately, as she cordially invited him.

"Cecy gets 'em!" Martin thought, with an inward chuckle. Doctor Robert said that he would be sure to ride over some day. Throaty and dignified with his trimmed beard and big glasses, he reported reassuringly upon Ellen. Just a few days' quiet in bed, that was all she needed, and—he added, with a significant glance for Cecy—a dose of big sister. She wanted her big sister.

Cecilia, smiling at him kindly, and astonished at his unexpected graciousness, left the two men together, and went with the nun upstairs to the infirmary. Order, silence, shining dustlessness everywhere, tempered sunshine outside, on the spring roses and the blazing flowerbeds; tree shadows over the well-swept garden walks, the scattered benches, the tennis courts and fountains. Inside, polished floors, noiseless feet, lowered voices, wide clean spaces filled with clear light and clear shadow.

"Sister," the nun's voice, addressing another nun who passed her, was merely a soft hiss, like the sound of a kettle, "did you——"

Cecy lost the message. It was silently, smilingly received; the two parted again. The delicate chipping of unseen feet, the almost inaudible closing of a great door, and then silence.

Silence. The wide infirmary, shaded against the morning light, was full of whiteness, and cleanness, and silence.

Ellen was ecstatic with delight. She confessed to Cecy, when they were alone, that her illness had been half homesickness. How was darling Pop, and Mom, and Paul? Paul was trying a new treatment again? Would they operate again?

She looked lean, sweet, unformed, at sixteen, in her pretty nightgown. Everyone was "peachy" to her, it appeared. Rob Costello gave her a pain, with the airs he put on, but the nuns and the girls were one and all "peachy." An immaculate, much-laundered light blanket, between two flat, immaculate linen sheets, covered her. There were roses in a sparkling glass jar beside her. Everything was ordered and fresh and spotless. She wriggled about animatedly, swooped to the floor for a fallen book.

"Is your food nice, darling?"

"Yes, what that simp Rob Costello lets me have! Oh, yes, my trays are gorgeous. Baked custards, and chicken and everything."

"It's a lovely atmosphere, isn't it?"

"Isn't what?"

"The convent. I love it."

"Oh, help!" ejaculated Ellen. "You can have it! I get out of here in June, and if I ever come back, it'll be under chloroform."

"Oh, I love it," Cecy said, wistfully. "I loved Saint Elizabeth's when they took boarders there, but this is lovelier, somehow."

"This is the mother house for California; all the postulants and novices come here," said Ellen, wisely. "Listen, Sis," she added, animatedly, "you can save my life, if you will, but if you ever tell Mom, I'll cut my throat."

"Oh, Ellen darling, don't talk so wildly. Is it money?"

"Money? It's one of the day-boarder's brothers—Jim Dale, his name is. Isn't it a cute name?"

"Ellen Cunningham! Mom would simply skin you!"

"Yes, I know she would. Well, anyway, he keeps hanging 'round here—he came to one of our dances, and he wrote me a letter about eloping—and I want you to telephone him for me——"

"Wrote you about—*what!*"

"About eloping," repeated Ellen, serenely. "He's twenty-two. He—you might as well know it, Cecy, he kissed me. I may as well tell you, we're sorter engaged."

"My Lord, how old are you?" Cecilia ejaculated, aghast.

"I'm almost seventeen!"

"Well, you'll feel smart when Pop gets hold of all this."

"Oh, he won't. Mother Bertrand just laughed. She talked to Jim's father about it. Anyway, I don't care, because Jim's coming up to the Lake this summer——"

"I hope you will marry young, Ellen," Cecy said, suddenly, out of deep thought. "If you don't—you seem to get old so suddenly——"

But she was not thinking of Ellen, except in a sort of general sense. She was thinking of the big clean hallways, the polished floors, the chipping feet, the white veils and black going busily about their appointed tasks. And suddenly she knew that she would enter the convent as a postulant. She was strong, of age, her own mistress.

The intoxication of it thrilled in Cecy's veins like secret wine. She could hardly wait for the exquisite hours of the days to come, that should confirm and develop the great fact. She had found life, her own life, full and sweet and satisfying; she drew in great breaths of it.

Early in the afternoon, after the luncheon with a hundred uniformed girls, Sister Mary Baptist came smilingly to Cecy, with Good Mother's invitation to remain overnight. Martin went away. Cecy abandoned herself to the exquisite beginning of her dream.

It was not that she decided anything; there was nothing to decide. She was simply here, and she belonged here; this was her atmosphere, and to be hers for ever and for ever.

She sat with Ellen, met Ellen's closest friends, walked in the garden with her old friend, Sister Aloysius. Sister Aloysius was Mistress of Novices now, and Cecy thrilled to see her motherly ways with the "White Veils." The novices looked shyly and amiably at Cecy, and the girl looked back ardently, enviously.

The perfect afternoon lingered to twilight, delicious bells rang, there was Benediction in the chapel. Cecy hated her beautiful hat, longed for one of the coarse net veils that the aspirant religious wore.

Sunset light glowed in the memorial windows, topaz and ruby glass sent bright blots of colour to fall upon the beautiful little chancel. The candles were eclipsed by the glory of the dying day, the air was sweet with heavy incense, and the young, virgin voices chanted the "Laudate Dominum."

Hidden in their veils, the nuns prayed, the postulants bowed their young heads. A few visitors, mothers of scholars, or devout women from the village, rustled on the uneasy polished benches.

"This is my sanctum," Sister Aloysius said, cheerfully, to Cecy, later that evening. The novices, like a troop of shy, awkward, radiant young deer, had gone to bed; Ellen was asleep. The Mistress of Novices had taken Cecilia in for a little parting talk. "Every one of my girls may find me here, at certain hours, and they come to me with all their troubles!" she said. "Poor children, we have seven nationalities represented here now, and twice as many states, and sometimes we have lively times reconciling them all to the new ways. But they struggle, and they succeed!"

"Tell me some of their trials," Cecy begged with relish, looking with passionate interest at the plain little room, with its bare floors and walls, its somewhat forbidding crucifix, and its hard chairs.

"Oh, they differ! Sensitiveness to criticism is a common one,

the feeling of being misunderstood." The nun crossed her arms, burying her hands in her big loose serge sleeves, and the beads of her enormous rosary rattled. "Some of them I can laugh at, some are more serious. I preach my sermons here, and do all my scolding, and then at recreation I let them all be happy!"

"And what do you do at recreation, Sister?"

"Well, if it's fine, we always walk. You see we have forty acres here, so there is plenty of room. Sometimes good Sister Mary Joseph asks us to help her gather fruit or berries, sometimes I turn them all loose in the laundry, and they whisk through Sister Ligouri's dish-towels before she knows what has happened. On feast days we have chocolate hidden in the garden, or some little treat for dinner, and when it rains we have games in the Recreation Hall. Last year we went out with rakes, and saved all of Thomas's hay for him; we are always busy, I assure you."

"And what time do you get up, Sister?"

"At five, winter and summer. Meditation in the chapel from half-past five until Mass at seven, then breakfast, and then all sorts of duties! Class-rooms, music lessons, housework——"

"It sounds so happy——" Cecy mused, smilingly.

"Happy! My dear child, for the nun who has the true vocation it is the Kingdom of Heaven on earth."

Cecy sat staring at her, with whitened cheeks and luminous eyes. Suddenly she slid from her chair to her knees, at the nun's feet, and buried her face in the full, coarse skirts.

CHAPTER XXIII

KATE, coming quietly into the Cunningham house in Howard Street, upon a summer day, was directed upstairs by a single nod from a grave-faced maid, and found Allie Cunningham crossing the wide spaces of the upper hall.

"Come in here, Kate!" Allie said, mysteriously, catching the collar of Kate's coat. She drew her into Cecy's room.

"How is he?" asked Kate, seriously expectant.

Allie merely shrugged, faintly shaking her head. Her lip trembled.

"Does Aunt Mollie see it?"

"She must see it. Pete does. God help us all!" said Allie in a whisper, weeping. "It'll be the death of every last one of us!"

Kate sat down, sighing. In her plain suit and rich brown fur, her handsome hat pressed down over her blue eyes, she was more beautiful than ever. There was a certain fineness, a sweetness about her now that was new. The exquisite face, with its high cheek-bones and deep-set eyes, was a trifle thinner, and its contour more plain; her chestnut hair clung in rich shining rings against the brim of her hat.

"How are your children, Kate?" Allie asked, with a sniff.

"Oh, they're wonderful. I'm weaning Rosemary; the doctor says she's too much for me. They're all glorious. Frank is getting to be an absolute devil, and what he doesn't get poor Jimmy into isn't worth——"

She broke off. Maggie Walsh had come quietly in.

"How is he, Allie? Hello, Kate," said the newcomer, lifelessly.

Allie again shook her head.

"What I want you to do, Kate," she said in a whisper, "is talk Cecy out of this convent notion. As if poor Mollie hadn't enough on her mind, with Tom laying in a foreign grave somewheres for all we know, and Ellen back in school, and now the poor baby—I don't know what's come to her. She went over to the convent last spring with Mart, and there's been nothing else to it ever since!"

"But, Aunt Allie," Kate said, temperately, "if her heart's set on it——?"

"Why don't she marry Leo Cudahy, that's coining money?" Maggie demanded, impatiently. "I never heard the like of such nonsense! What better would she want? Pete admires him very much, and Mollie breakin' her heart for Cecy to have him, and all this convent talk goin' on! If anything happens to Paul she'll never forgive herself that she run out on them——"

"What does the doctor say?" Kate, with a cautious glance at the door, demanded in a low tone.

"Nothin' much," Allie sighed, and her eyes watered again. "But you know Mollie was all for gettin' Paul back to the Lake, a few weeks ago. And the doctor kinder talked her out of it. 'It's cool and comfortable in this big house,' he says. 'Leave him be, here, where all his grand toys are,' he says."

"You'd wonder Mollie wouldn't get onto it, his saying that," Maggie commented. Kate's passionately loving heart went in spirit to Frank, aged four, Jim, two years younger, and Rosemary, the baby, and a sickness of fear touched her. God! to lose one of them! How did mothers bear it?

"Mart told Paul that your motor-car was outside, Kate," Cecy said, in a subdued voice, appearing like a quiet wraith before them. "And Paul wants to see you!"

"Bless his heart, he's well enough to want things, then?" Kate said, clearly and cheerfully, making a little wholesome stir in the unnatural quiet of the upper hallway. She crossed to Paul's big room, entered gaily.

But instantly a sort of hush came upon her, and although she walked straight to the bed, and knelt down, with one of her warm, beautiful hands laid over his little languid one, it was in

a different manner. Peter—Uncle Peter home in the daytime! —was sitting quietly in a big chair, a few feet away. Aunt Mollie, red-eyed and very white, but resolutely smiling and composed, was coming and going.

Paul, smiling too, moved only his big eyes to greet her. In his immaculate little pajamas he looked slight, his small face was absolutely bloodless. There were toys in the room still, neat toys ranged upon shelves, but Kate knew without looking, and felt her heart turn to ice to know, that the goldfish and the parrot, the big Angora cat and the horribly odorous, yet adored, white mice had been taken away.

"When'd you get back, Kate?" Paul asked, in his shadow of a voice. His thin little thumb rubbed back and forth against her warm firm hand.

"Last night, darling. We had those three wild babies of mine up at the camp, and whether we'll ever get them civilized again or not I don't know!"

"You've been gone a long time, Kate," said Mollie, in a voice drained of everything but blind courage.

"Since May. You won't know them! Sunburn, freckles, poison-oak, they haven't missed a thing!"

She was talking over a sick horror in her heart. Paul had not been well all those summer months ago, but he had not been like this! Terror, for the first time, touched her sharply. It couldn't be possible that this fight, this scare among so many scares, was to be the last? No—no—no, screamed Kate's own motherhood, deep within her.

"Pop's lost his job!" Paul jeered, smiling weakly at his father. Peter dragged himself up from the gates of hell, smiled.

"They fired the old man, Kate," he admitted. This was an inexhaustible joke. Paul, when business hours were abridged for his sake, always taunted his father, and Peter was always deeply mortified.

"I'll bet this boy would take a spoonful of your good soup jelly now, Mama," Peter suggested. The women in the halls were telling each other that Paul had not "kep' down" an ounce of nourishment for days.

The sick little boy's eyes clouded with protest, and he faintly shook his head.

"Please—Mummy. It makes me so sick!" he whispered.

"Well, then, you don't have to, dear," Peter was the first to assure him. But his heart was lead.

"No," said Mollie, sitting down close to the bed, in a tone only her own sick, desperate courage preserved upon its old, cheerful, motherly note. "He don't have to. Maybe he'll have a little nap, and then he'll feel hungry!"

Kate, stricken to the heart, went out of the big quiet room, where the familiar papered walls, and the window shades drawn against the glare of the summer afternoon, and the dim carpet across which trains and tin soldiers had travelled so many miles, seemed waiting—waiting.

"Did he take any soup?" Allie asked her, in the hall. Kate shook her head.

"He must have a marvellous constitution," she murmured.

"Oh, my!" Allie answered, shaking her own head, biting her lip. "She had another letter from Tom," she added, with a little jerk of her head toward Mollie's room, as an indication that she spoke of Mollie.

"China again? Is he coming home?" Kate asked, eagerly. Tom's mother so needed him now!

"Rangoon. It seems it's Burma," Allie said, lifelessly. "You'd think their oldest would be home with them, at this time," she added, darkly. "Never a word of coming home in it, and he was on the move again! She cried something terrible."

"Aunt Mollie did? Oh, poor thing!"

"She kep' sayin': 'He has a right to be here—he has a right to be here!'" Allie reported, sombrely.

"Oh, it is a cruel trial for them now, not even to know where Tom is!" Kate exclaimed.

"He says he's sendin' her a white fox coat," Allie continued. "I'd white fox him, the rennygade!"

"Aunt Allie, do they think Paul's so bad?" Kate's voice was no more than a fearful whisper.

Allie merely looked at her, the old, old look of hopeless grief.

"The doctor said Mollie needn't tease 'um to eat nothin' no longer," she said, lifelessly.

Kate's indrawn breath whistled between her teeth.

"But what about another doctor—other doctors?"

"Oh, Kate, we've had them all!"

Cecy, quietly joining them, on the top step of the broad stairway, pressed her handkerchief to her brimming eyes.

"This morning the doctor said he was afraid Paul was going on a long journey," she whispered. Kate's eyes dilated.

"He says, 'Well, you have a right to feel pretty badly, little boy!'" Allie added. "An' then out here he says, sort of gently to me and Cecy, 'I'm afraid our little boy is goin' on a long journey.'"

"My God, my God, my God!" Kate whispered. And for a few moments they were all silent.

Then Kate went upstairs to Martin's room.

The happy room, the room where they had all played "Lotto" and "Parchesi" as children, so many years ago! Where boys had flung distorted sweaters, had whittled, cleaned "B.B." guns, scattered transfers and stamps and cherry pits and all the other rubbish that had been gathered and hoarded so carefully years ago, and cleaned away, and that was now beginning to accumulate in Kate's clean big sunshiny rooms in turn.

Martin was flung face downward on his bed, but he got up immediately, splashed his face with water, combed his dripping hair. Kate took the chair beside the bureau.

"I had no idea," she said, in a long pause. "I came right over!"

"None of us had any idea it was so—close," Martin answered.

"There's a lock sticking straight up behind, Mart," Kate, watching him comb, said. "You've got it!"

He laid both brushes down, rested his elbows on the high dresser, mussed his hair with the grip of his big hands. Kate felt a physical sickness come over her, chill, cramp, utter weakness, as if the vital forces within her had turned to water.

Martin presently began to comb his hair again, turned upon her a colourless and automatic smile.

"All right, Katy, let's go down!"

She stretched a cold hand. They went downstairs, their fingers still locked, together. Kate found her uncle and Ellen in the downstairs sitting room, she and Ellen coaxed him to eat a little, to talk a little. He would talk only of Paul, but even that, she hoped, might not be as bad for him as the frozen silence of grief.

"Joe Riordan was cryin' when he ast for him to-day. I'll not forget that of Joe——"

"He's never had a child, has he?"

"No. The poor feller! He thought—he thinks the world and all of our Paul——"

Silence. Silence. After a while, in the early summer evening, they went upstairs to Paul's room again.

The child moved only his heavy, beautiful eyes to welcome them. Martin was kneeling beside the bed, and his big brown hands were locked over Paul's languid white ones. But the brothers were talking only in snatches.

Peter sat down, Kate took a chair. Mollie, her rosary twisted about her soft, full fingers, was in her usual place near the bed.

"Mart," said Paul's weak shadow of a voice, "where's Holy Joe?"

"Where is he? He's right here," Martin said, gently. "Lord, what that poor feller hasn't gotten into to-day! Would you like me just to sort of murmur along about him? Maybe you could drop off to sleep, and when you waked up," Martin went on, with a sort of dreamy easiness, "Gosh, how hungry you'd feel!"

Paul smiled, shut his eyes. His feeble fingers moved slowly across his brother's hand.

"Not now," he said. "But, Mart," he added, as Martin, looking down at his white little face, began to hope that perhaps he was sleeping in the shallow, brief fashion that was habitual of late, "Mart, will you say my prayers with me? Because I can't think awfully good——" Paul murmured, with shut eyes.

Silence. There was only one shaded light in the big room. Kate saw Peter, a great bulk in the soft gloom, slide stiffly from his armchair to his knees. Her heart began to hammer with terror.

"G'wan, Mart," Paul whispered, expectantly, not opening his eyes.

"S—sure I will," Mart answered.

"Here's Papa goin' to say his prayers with his boys, too," Peter's voice said softly, thickly. Paul opened his great shadowed eyes, smiling.

"Pop," he asked, faintly, "do you 'member when you'd say, 'What is Mr. Emporium goin' to tell Mrs. Emporium the little Cunningham boy got to-day'?"

"Don't I though?" Peter answered, clearing his throat.

Mollie, her face expressionless, calm, lighted with a strange pallor, sank to her knees. Cecy peeped in, flew, returned to kneel by the bed. Ellen and Allie were there, noiselessly gathering forms in the dusky shadows. Kate, kneeling, hid her face in her hands. Her throat was dry, her heart pressed by an agony too great for bearing.

"Oh, God help us," she thought, frightened. "Oh, God help us! We *cannot* bear it——"

"Mart——" said Paul, his weak voice falling like the sound of a dying bell in the absolute stillness of the room.

"Sir to you!" It was the little old family phrase of encouragement. Martin's white face, found by Kate's aching eyes, was set like a mask of tortured muscles. He did not know that he had spoken.

"Mart, if you was only a little feller," Paul murmured, "would you be a-scared, too?"

"Now, do you mean, dear?" Martin asked, after a second.

"Yes, now."

"No, I don't think I'd be scared, Paul," Martin answered, in a voice he made quiet. "I'd think that God loved little kids. Daisy wasn't but three, you know!"

"Daisy wasn't scared!" Paul said, in a stronger, in almost a boasting voice. "And she was only a baby!"

Silence. Paul's eyes were shut, he was breathing lightly and irregularly, against Martin's big shoulder.

"Neither am I!" he said, presently, with a child's deep, mysterious air of content.

He opened his big, dark blue Irish eyes, so oddly wise in the pale, little-boy face from which the healthy tan and freckles had faded years ago. They moved languidly over the group, found his mother's eyes, and smiled faintly.

"Mom——" His lips only formed the word, there was no sound. It was Tom's name, Mart's name, for her, rarely used by any one else. Then, for the last time, Paul's eyes closed again.

"Well, go ahead! Ain't we goin' to say our prayers, Mart?" he whispered, with just a hint of surprise, just a hint of impatience, in his loving, weary, satisfied little voice.

Kate's head was splitting, her mouth so dry that breathing was an agony. She could not cry; somebody sobbed once sharply and was still—Cecy or Allie. The lamp burned softly and clearly, a pool of warm gold in the hush of the room. There was no stir among the bowed and kneeling forms.

"Our Father who art in heaven," Martin's thick voice said, softly and steadily, "Hallowed be Thy Name—— Thy Kingdom come——"

"It's Paul, dyin'," Mollie thought, quietly. "It's the baby dyin'. My God, keep me like this—— Keep me from feelin' it, just for a little while!"

Lights and movement turned the night into day. Nobody could go to bed, there was only occasional pitiful talk of Mollie lying down, of Mart "getting some rest."

Peter, grey, stout, haggard, sat in the downstairs sitting room. He was very quiet. Before the cold dawn came they had a fire there, and Ellen, red-eyed with weeping, got into his lap in the old baby fashion, and clung there like a tired bird. "My little ger'rl, she's the baby of the family now. And thank God we have a son and dear girls left to us," Peter said.

The house was filled with smothered sobbing and wailing.

The aged grandmother came, old friends came. A few of them, privileged, went up to Mollie's room, wept with her.

"Oh, Mollie dear, it's hard to bury them, the creatures!" they said. "Poor Lizzie's just through it. God love him, he never knew the touch of mortal sin! Well, Mollie, you've certainly had your share!"

The Archbishop came, knelt beside the exquisite figure of wax.

"The dove, finding no place to rest her foot, returned to Him in the ark!" said His Grace, in his heavy, slow tones. The women repeated it, Mollie, exhausted and faint of voice, told everyone who came with floods of fresh-running tears, what the Archbishop had said of her little saint.

Sometimes recollections stirred her, she talked of Daisy, of all the children's childhood, the sweet dead days of scratches and measles and dolls and sand-boxes.

Then the bitter realization would come rushing back.

"But I can't believe he's gone—not to come back into his room, and call out to Mart, when Mart comes in!" Mollie would whisper. "I lived for him—my whole life was in there beside him! Pete never spent an evenin' away from him, he was up there before dinner, and he'd take his paper up there afterward, and talk to the child, or maybe listen to what he'd be sayin' to Mart about 'Holy Joe'——"

The child lay downstairs, in all the formal splendour of the big double parlours; Kate and Allie had many willing hands to help them as they changed the entire aspect of the room that had been Paul's for so many years. The toys disappeared, chairs and tables were pushed into different places, the potted flowers, the parrot, the goldfish never came back again, nor the shining railroad tracks on the floor, nor the Victrola.

About a week after the funeral Kate came in, with her two sturdy baby sons, to find Martin moving downstairs to occupy the so terribly empty apartment.

Martin had aged strangely; he seemed a man. Everyone in the family knew what Paul had meant to him, but he showed little of his grief, and it was only in his changed manner that

they read it. He impressed little Frank and Jim Kelly at once into his service.

"Here, you bums. Keep your hands off that camera. If you want jobs I'll give you jobs——"

The diminutive brothers, staggering in their stout little striped rompers, shrieked with excitement as Martin tumbled them upon the unmade bed.

"You'll kill them," Kate predicted, glad of a pretence at cheerfulness. "Here—where are sheets? I'll make this bed. I think this was a good idea, Mart," she added, approvingly. "It brings you down with Aunt Mollie and the girls; it's much more sociable."

"You're one of the few living women, Kate, who pull the sheets snug. The maids adore to leave 'em bagging, so that your feet are in a muddle all night."

"Doesn't John always know it if Biddy makes his bed?" Kate said, her splendid figure erect as she swept blankets through the air. "He'll wriggle and twist——"

She stopped, with the married woman's delicacy, as Cecy and Ellen came in. Mollie, weary and heavy, followed them, and sat down to watch the scene.

"Go kiss Aunt Mollie, Frank," Kate directed the staring babies. "Go with Brother, Jim. Do as Mother tells you!"

"Changes, Katie," Mollie said, raising apathetic eyes.

"You look better, dear," Kate said, gently, kissing her. "Did you get out to-day?"

"I went to church. And I was goin' with Pete to the cemetery," Mollie answered, in lifeless, quiet accents, "but your Uncle Peter wouldn't leave me go. He wants that the stone should be put up before I go."

"He picked out a lovely stone; he and I went together," Martin told Kate. "Just like Daisy's—plain, with the standing angel."

Mollie's face crumpled, and she began to cry. Nobody paid her the slightest attention, they all murmured cheerfully together, although Ellen's eyes watered, and the tears ran frankly down Cecy's cheeks.

"And what do you think of that one wantin' to run off and be a nun on us?" Mollie, restored to her usual mournful composure, presently asked.

"Oh, well, Aunt Mollie, that's as much a vocation as getting married!" Kate reminded her, cheerfully.

"Papa's willing," Cecy said, quietly but eagerly.

"Before I'd be a nun I'd go bad!" Ellen contributed with conviction. Martin laughed with exaggerated mirth, and Kate was glad to see that her aunt had spirit enough left to be shocked.

"Elleneen, don't say such things, and show your ignorance!" she reprimanded her younger daughter.

"Well, I would," persisted Ellen, perfectly conscious of the fact that a little controversy was wholesome for her stricken mother.

"Well, you don't have to be a nun, dear little sister!" Cecy assured Ellen, with a merry laugh and an embrace. There was already about Cecy the sureness of the elect. There were to be no scenes, no storms and tears about her vocation now; she was confident and patient and serene at last.

"Why she wouldn't marry, and maybe give me a grandchild," Mollie complained, mildly, with a dark look at Cecy, "when a fine feller like Leo Cudahy comes after her, with his car, and loads of money, and more some day when his bachelor uncle dies, beats me! She won't look at him. Oh, no, it's all religion now, and the white veil, and Sister This and That!"

"You can live as good a life in the world as in any convent," Maggie Walsh, who came in almost every day to chat with and comfort her bereaved sister, said sententiously. "Believe me, it isn't all easy for the Sisters. 'There's faults and fights wherever there's wrongs and rights,' as the sayin' goes, and many's the time them nuns would like to be back in their good homes again!"

Cecy, her eyes full of dreams, dreams of wide, quiet halls, of shaded garden walks, of the silent chapel in the cool summer dawn, made no answer. But Kate said pacifically:

"Still, a religious vocation is a beautiful thing, Aunt Maggie."

"If you have it!" Maggie answered. "But some's called

to one thing, and some to another. There was a very old aged priest of eighty or more I ast would I marry poor Frank Cahill. 'Some's called to one thing and some to another,' he told me. I never forgot it on him!"

"And he was right," said Allie. "Look at me! Here for more than twenty-five years I run my brother's house for him, and whether it'll stand to me credit on the Judgment Day, or whether——"

"Well, I don't know why my children should be such a bitter trile to me!" Mollie said, heavily, with trembling lips. She got slowly to her feet, and the others watched her solemnly as she went from the room.

Kate followed her to her own room, made her lie down on the bed and spread a rug on the stout, unromantic, middle-aged feet Mollie turned up so pathetically. Then she perched herself at the foot, in all the glory of her own beautiful youth and happy motherhood, and they fell into one of the long matronly talks by which Mollie had distinguished her niece of late years.

With Allie, Maggie, and her daughters Mollie could discuss death, bereavement, change, illness, weddings, religious matters. But with Kate, nowadays, she could go further; there were only the limits of Christian modesty and reserve upon their conversations now. Husbands, and their strangely trying and endearing ways, babies and their little throats and stomachs, all the delicate questions of weaning them, of calculating their arrivals, of physical symptoms on the part of mothers and children, were theirs to review now.

When Kate was physically miserable, albeit philosophical and thankful under the common cross, Mollie was mournfully triumphant.

"Ah, well, you must look for that, dear!"

"But it's feeling so utterly *limp*, Aunt Mollie! I no sooner get out of bed but what I want to get back into it again. I often wonder what women do who can't afford a nurse for the other children! I can't raise my hand!"

"It's all part of it, Kate. You'll thank God when you have a fine child in your arms!"

And when Kate, sobered by knowledge, turned a little pale, and fixed thoughtful narrowed eyes upon space, at the mention of the approaching ordeal, Mollie was reassuring.

"Look at me, that went through it seven times, and never a whiff of anything to help me! He's got his ticket, as the sayin' is, Kate, and when the time comes he's going to start, and that's all there is to it."

"One wonders," the younger mother would say, softly, in a half-musing tone, "one wonders if this time one may be taken. What a hard death, Aunt Mollie, leaving the little helpless creatures without a mother!"

"But look at you, Kate, that had neither mother nor father! And look at all's come to you, rich, and with a good man, and these fine children——"

"Yes, I know. Indeed I do think of that!"

"There's nothing could come to her too good for that one!" Maggie always said of Kate, when any comment upon her niece's prosperity was made in her hearing. For Kate was among that army of young women who are generally described as "good to her own."

Every step toward ease and beauty in her own fortunate life was accompanied by increasing comfort in the plain little cottage in Turk Street. Grandma, to be sure, shrill and vigorous, refused flatly to move into a more modern apartment, where a gas stove and elevator would make her declining years less hard. Old Mrs. Walsh refused to decline. Some interested house-hunters, innocently under the impression that the cottage was for rent, and approaching with queries, she sent forth with bitter vituperations, and ever afterward characterized as "them Christian Scientists that would of let me Lady Washin'tons die on me!"

But Maggie could take down the sign that said "Walsh. Modes." now, and what Mrs. Walsh called a "little Jap lady that wants to learn to speak English off us," came in daily to do the housework. Harry and Charley, still incorrigibly idle and drifting, were yet somewhat better groomed, and even more lofty and complacent than ever. They called at irregular inter-

vals, and with great dignity, upon John Kelly, and John always plunged his generous hand into his pocket when they came, and laughed with Kate about them afterward.

"It won't be for ever, poor old things!" said Kate.

Mollie's generosity, always the one stable element that kept the Walsh family afloat, became even more marked, to correspond with Kate's. In the old times, Mollie had questioned, had expected some sort of accounting, had criticized her unambitious brothers. But now she vied with her niece in open-handedness. Maggie never would have a bank-account or a check-book, the mere thought of such commercial technicalities made her uneasy. But she liked to carry bills, or the notification of taxes, into Peter's or John's office, and spread them anxiously, with her decent black suède glove, beneath the male eye.

And she loved to have money in her purse: large silver dollars, a twenty-dollar bill folded up small. Kate took possession of this purse at almost every meeting, and Maggie would laugh deprecatingly while she pretended not to see the transfers that were made.

Kate and Maggie often lunched at the Palace Hotel or the Fairmont now, and Maggie had the black lace gown and the hat with the pink roses for warm spring and autumn days, and said that she felt like "Paddy's gander."

"Chicken Maryland, Aunt Mag," the gracious woman who was her hostess would ask her. "Do you remember the hot nights we'd decide what we'd have? Or maybe winter, with all our wet coats smelling up the kitchen?"

"Tell him somethin', and get rid of him!" Maggie would say, of the waiter, in an agonized undertone. "Don't it seem like a dream, Kate?" she would ask, looking out upon the descending slopes of the city and the blue bay cut with the sharp wakes of the ferry-boats.

The music would begin, the big room fill with beautiful women, beautiful gowns, pleasant voices. And when anybody bowed to young Mrs. John Kelly, and Mrs. John Kelly nodded and smiled in return, Maggie's heart always swelled with felicity, and she reported the circumstance later to her mother.

Afterward, they would loiter down the two steep blocks to Chinatown, Maggie would have a new kimono, there would be tea for Grandma. "And I oughter send May Buckley something for the Bazaar!" Maggie would remember.

"Oh, let me, Aunt Mag. I'd love to!" Kate would say. And when they ended their expedition with a visit to dim, shabby old St. Mary's, where there was "Forty Hours'," and the candles winked through furry pussywillows on the high altar, Maggie looked at the young bowed form beside her almost reverently, and went home to say thankfully that thank God Kate was as good, as pious, as unspoiled as in the shabby, tempestuous, hungry, ambitious days of the old Library.

It was a delicious note in her life that Allie, Pete's sister, who had lived in the big house, sheltered and safe, for twenty, almost thirty years, envied her now. Actually envied Maggie Walsh, who had no big house to manage, and no prosperous sister-in-law like Mollie to keep satisfied!

"We're a grand family now, what with poor Mollie grievin' so bitter, and the most of them scattered to the four winds!" Allie complained to Maggie. "I'd be very glad to make the retreat with you, if it wasn't I had a new table ger'rl to break in that never seen a fingerbowl before! 'Oh,' she says, 'an' when you put the lemon into them, do you put a tasteen of the bar sugar along with it?' 'I'll bar sugar you, in a place you don't expect, me fine young ger'rl, that has the gall to expect sixty dollars a month for what you do!' I told her."

"It's easy for me to make the retreat," Maggie answered, complacently. "I and Ma have a cup of good coffee at seven, and then she gets out into the garden and fixes her plants, and I do my marketin' on the way to the convent. Keno comes in at nine, and she cooks Ma's lunch. Or maybe Ma and I go out to Kate's——"

"Kate's the lucky one," Allie mused. "You'd wonder one of Mollie's hadn't a right to get married; it's Kate that got it all. She takes it very hard, poor Mollie, and God knows she's had her share! Now Cecy's surely goin' to enter—Pete made no fuss at all about it. He's very broke, over Paul. 'We

haven't no right to stop them, Allie,' he says to me. She'll go in just before Lent. And with Tom gone, and Paul, God love him, and Cecy—dear, dear, ain't life the limit?"

"Dear knows what Mollie'll do now," Maggie mused. "I was there the other day, runnin' up a little dress for Ellen, that's getting so big, and she come in from upstairs. 'Nobody in the nursery now, Mag,' she says, with a look of death on her, 'nobody in Tom's room, Mart's room empty, Paul gone, and my little Daisy that used to tell how the choo-choo went! And next spring,' she says, 'Cecy's room, too!' You would have felt sorry for her," Maggie finished, simply.

"Mollie had it too easy, for years upon years," was Allie's thoughtful comment before a long silence fell.

CHAPTER XXIV

KATE, Ellen, and Mollie accompanied Cecy to the convent on the Monday before Mardi Gras. It was a smoking hot, blue spring day, and Kate's little boys, running about on the clean, bright deck of the boat, showed damp curls pressed against wet little foreheads when their mother straightened their wide sailor hats.

They were beautiful children: Frank, tall, rangy and fair, like his mother; Jim stocky and dark, and already John's double. Ellen made much of them, and Mollie admired them in a sad sort of way. But Kate was a trifle worried about two facts: one that Frank must positively have his tonsils out before he could put on any weight, and the other that Jim had been playing with Baby all morning, and that she, Kate, had later discovered that Jim had been exposed to measles yesterday. The Prendergast children all had it, not badly, but unmistakably measles.

"I'm not afraid of it for Jim," Kate said more than once, as they made the pleasant trip, in the freshness of the bay airs. "He's as hard as nails, and besides, a child his age is on an easy diet. But my Rosemary's a picky and choosy little eater; she never finishes a bottle, and eggs—Biddy and I tried her on eggs—seem to poison her. She'll flirt with me, and she seems perfectly well, but she doesn't gain the way she ought to. And I hate measles. They so often leave a child with something. Didn't dear little Daisy have measles?"

"Oh, yes, but it was Tom had them so heavy," Mollie remembered, with the customary heavy sigh. "Daisy's come out on her good, and the baby's—that was Mart then, wasn't nothin'. But Tom——"

After all, there was nothing sensational about the sacrifice of

a daughter to God. The convent was looking its beautiful best in the spring glory of flowers and new leafage, and Cecy bloomed like a bride as Sister Stanislaus took possession of her.

The nun showed them pleasantly and easily the white-curtained alcove where Cecy would sleep, the postulants' little refectory, with polished bare floor, polished bare table, geraniums blooming on the wide window-sill, the recreation room.

"I may put her in one of the guest-rooms to-night," said Sister Aloysius, "for I have two dear girls coming from Hollister to-morrow, sisters, and I'll take my three chickens under my wing at once. We have four other postulants, and as soon as these new ones get a little easier, I can have them all together. But perhaps I'll have Cecilia wear her hat for another twenty-four hours."

"Oh, *Sister !*" Cecy pleaded, her face pitiful with disappointment.

"And oh, Cecilia!" the nun mimicked her tone cheerfully. "You know you have to obey now. That's the hardest and the first lesson to learn," she added, crossing herself with a generous sweep of her firm, clean hand, as they passed a tiny holy-water font and a soaked sponge; "and the last!" she added, leading them into the morning silence and beauty of the shaded chapel, where they all said a devout prayer for the success of the new postulant. "She loves me now!" Sister Aloysius said, good-humouredly, in parting, with her arm once more about the radiant Cecilia's waist. "But she's going to dislike me heartily in a few weeks! Wait until I begin to scold her, as I do all my girls!"

The family group was rather silent, going home without Cecy. Kate's younger son went peacefully to sleep in her arms, on the boat, with his little plump leg rolling back and forth across her knee. Kane and the car were waiting on the other side. Mollie drove her niece to her own door, but she would not come in.

"She looked old for the first time, John," Kate told her husband later. "Even Tom's going away, and all the uncertainty and anxiety, even Paul's death, didn't seem to take it out of her

somehow the way Cecy's entering did! She looked broken. She told me that she minded most for Uncle Pete. 'God sent them to me, and He can dispose of them!' she said to me. But she's a different woman from my old, arrogant, confident Aunt Mollie! Go on now, sweetest," Kate added in an undertone to the baby, who was gurgling, rolling, crowing, and doing everything but finish her ten-o'clock bottle.

"If she doesn't want it, why do you make her take it, Kate?" John demanded, with a fa nt hint of impatience in his voice.

"She does want it, darling, only she doesn't know it!" Kate responded, blithely.

"I suppose you're going to break our hearts one of these days, entering a convent, or something?" John demanded, of his youngest born.

"She's going to go to sleep now," Kate decided, taking away the bottle and bundling the baby expertly on her side, to tuck the little pink blanket snugly about her. Rosemary reared strongly, with a questioning look over her own diminutive shoulder. "No, you lie down!" directed Kate. "Put that light out, John. John, do we spoil them, as Uncle Peter and Aunt Mollie did?" she asked, as she and John went through the open dressing-room door to their own big room.

"I suppose so, sweetheart. I'm too crazy about them, and you spoil everybody," John said, thoughtfully. "I get to thinking about them sometimes, in the office, and I'll feel the tears on my face——"

"I know," Kate said. "But they *do* obey, John. And I do keep them simple! At the shore last summer they were the plainest dressed of all the youngsters."

"The eye of the needle," John reminded her, beginning his undressing.

"Yes, I know!" she said, soberly, with a sigh. And she sat for a long time motionless, a loose thin wrapper about her, her rich mass of chestnut hair tumbling on her shoulders. Her bare elbows were on the dressing-table, and her chin propped in one hand.

A hundred times he had seen her so, but never without a little check to his breath; that so much beauty and goodness was his, abiding here with him, that so rare a woman as Kate had cast her fortunes indissolubly in with his.

All about her were the evidences of their prosperity; her blue eyes reviewed them thoughtfully. The simple jewels, the jade and the crystals that John had given her were tumbled on a tray, the gold-backed toilet brushes and bottles ranged about them, the big beautiful room, with chintzes at the windows and deep chairs at the tiled fireplace, was luxuriously furnished. There was a big dressing room, where the adored baby was now asleep; an enormous bath. There were other rooms beyond, clean closets full of china and linen, airy bedrooms arranged especially for small hands and feet. On John's high dresser was an enlarged photograph of Kate herself, her first, taken only a few months after their marriage.

They had built this house, he and she, five years ago, and she had felt wild with excitement and delight then. A house—a mansion indeed, in the very heart of the Terraces! A wide, sunshiny garage, big porches, a dining room for the maids and nurse, and always a view of the rolling ocean only a few hundred feet away.

But to-night she was a little frightened. All very well to reach the apex of human achievement, to be rich and loved and good-looking and the mother of glorious children, but what then? What lay beyond?

"John," she said in a somewhat troubled voice, "we can't make them poor! I would—God knows I would, if it was best for them. I'd take a flat in McAllister Street, with you, and cook for them, and do for them! But we can't do that. Do you suppose they'll break our hearts some day, doing the wrong things and marrying the wrong people?"

"No, I don't suppose so," John answered, after a pause. "If we're only pretty sure that things *are* wrong, and people *are* wrong, before we make a fuss!"

"But look at Aunt Mollie," pursued Kate. "She's always been such a devoted mother, always so anxious that the children

should be good. Now, out of seven, she's left alone with Ellen and Mart——"

"Well, Ellen and Mart's the pick of the bunch, if you ask me," John said, encouragingly, as she paused. "Yes, but I think they made an awful mistake with Tom, sending him to Paris," he added. "I remember thinking so when he went. He was too handsome, to begin with, and then he's got all the Walsh—what do you call it?—charm, I guess. Dangerous! And I don't consider that Cecy, becoming a nun, has exactly disgraced them! As for Paul——" John sighed suddenly. "That might happen to anybody's kid," he said, mildly.

"The Lord forbid!" said Kate, braiding her hair.

"The Lord forbid indeed! But it's the way Aunt Mollie talks about all these things—the way she takes them——" John grumbled.

"Well, perhaps that's partly it. But surely, John," Kate said, argumentatively, "surely after all the agony and cost of having children, a mother and father can expect *something* back from them?"

John made no answer. Presently he asked her if she knew that she was the most beautiful woman in the world.

Kate, however, answered herself some months later. They were up in the mountains then, in the new camp.

For the first summer or two after their marriage they had visited the hotel near Mollie's camp; for the third they had taken one of her cottages. Now they had their own camp, wooded acres upon the sapphire tip of a little mountain lake, a piny carpet underfoot, a flood of scented golden sunshine pouring down through layers of redwood foliage all the summer long.

It was but three miles from Mollie's; a rambling, dipping corduroy road connected the two places. Kate had had a stark, unlovely farmhouse with a deep front porch, a tangle of deep-roofed old barns, to begin with. But presently a garage arose, green boxes outlining the porch dripped nasturtiums and geraniums, a supplementary cabin was built of redwood logs. "Mart's house," a single, pine-scented room, was erected by Mart himself at the turn of the wood trail; a hundred yards away a

screened dining room grew out of the whitewashed kitchen, and a brick grill and long table had their place under the pines by the shore.

To Kate it was Paradise, dearer even than the imposing city house. Her children, the dear little tumbled, dusty, weary children, were all her own here. It was with great difficulty that she and Biddy, the old crone of a nurse, persuaded them to submit, now and then, to the ordeal of being combed and washed, and taken down to the hotel for a meal. Kate and John extended a happy hospitality; other fathers and mothers, other troops of uproarious youngsters, came up for visits, and there was noise and clatter about the place all week long. Old Mrs. Walsh was almost always there, and Maggie as often as her sisterly obligations permitted.

On this particular evening seven children, Kellys and Prendergasts, the toddling Rosemary a shrieking and enthusiastic vanguard, had left the long, wooden-walled dining room by means of a low window, jumping into an abandoned armchair set in the garden a few feet below.

Kate lingered on, gossiping with Ellen and her Aunt Mollie, who had come up the day before, helping herself and them and the old grandmother and Maggie, who was her guest for the summer, to peaches, and a few more peaches, as the conversation wandered idly to and fro.

The day had been warm, but now the sun had disappeared with the abruptness that ends the light in the high mountains, and a delicious piny coolness was creeping into the burned air. Biddy waddled after the children with an armful of disreputable sweaters; their shouts came through the still clear blueness of the dusk. A great moon raised a shoulder over the dark water, drifted splendidly up over the pines. Crickets rasped, and frogs sent a pulsing brassy clamour through the air.

"'Why those children don't fall apart every night, with sheer tiredness," Ellen began, dreamily.

Silence. Everyone was pleasantly weary, heavy with food and sleep and the first hint of chill.

"Aunt Mollie," Kate asked, suddenly, her face almost invisi-

ble, her gown only a white glimmer in the gloom, "were you ever so happy that you were afraid?"

"Oh, manny's the time, dear!" Mollie said, sighing deeply. "When Pete and I begun to prosper so, and built the big house, haven't I gone on my knees frightened out of my wits, over and over again, for fear some sorrow'd befall me!"

"And God knows they did, Mollie," Maggie said, lovingly and sadly.

"Whin I had the whole boonch of me children, Robbie and Charley and Mollie here, and Mag and Harry," old Mrs. Walsh spoke up suddenly, "haven't the stren'th of joy come over me so bitther and so sorrowful that me hear'rt was ashes within me? I'd look about me—sure, everybody weren't millionaires thin, wit' cars and movin' pitchers and all, gas stoves and I don't know what," she diverged, "but we lived very decent and quiet. I'd a cook in me kitchen," she resumed, "and a wild little orphan ger'rl that had no parents, to look out for me young children, and enough to eat, and I thought I was Adelina Patti herself! And manny's the time I'd cast me glance at this neighbour and that, and say to meself, 'Sure, she has more than me! If the Lord's lookin' down that He may send a thrile to some poor mother, He'll not pick me yet awhile.'"

"Oh, Grandma, I've done that so often!" Kate exclaimed, with real relief under her delicious laugh.

"But it don't keep off the sorrow, Kate," Mollie reminded her.

"Well, then," Kate's voice was valiant in the dusk, "well, then, if you say to yourself that nothing will really hurt them except sin, and keep praying for them——"

And in the silence that followed, she answered the long-ago question, forgotten even by herself now.

"But remember this!" she said, vigorously. "Remember it, all of you, when Frank runs off with a tattooed lady, and Jim embezzles the company's funds, and Rosemary—oh, God forbid any one of them should ever do anything but be good!" Kate interrupted herself in a whisper. "But *remember*," she began impressively again, "that having them as we have them now, so adorable, all tumbles and bee bites and rompers and spilled

bowls, is reward enough for me, full measure, pressed down and running over, for anything I've ever done for them! If they'll just be spared to me, for arithmetic and blocks and Christmas trees, for a few more years, I'll try to bear whatever they do when they're grown up!"

"You say that now, Kate," Mollie said.

"Kate," her grandmother added, "is like an ould lady that lived to be ninety-eight, in some little boreen me grandmother, God rest her, resided in, wit' me Uncle Miles, that was kilt with the rheumatism the way he cud never walk a step, except the weather was very fine. Mrs. Towley—that was her name—sure it wint out of me head until this very instant minute! Towley. An' she was a quare one, that one, that wouldn't thank you for anny company that was in it, leave it be priest or Pope, but walkin' wit' the silly geese and ganders themselves. She had one boy left out of a baker's dozen, some dead, some gone away, and he was pushin' eighty whin I was no bigger than a goose's egg. He was very comickle, that one. He used to say he'd seen four Kings rulin' in London, and the only man amongst thim was a woman! Well, what does me brave ould boy do but run wit' some queer Dicks, and get himself tuk by the police, and run into the little hut they had, till they'd see had he anny stolen stuff on him, and bein' late, and a very wild, foul evenin', they kep' him there overnight wit' two or three wanderin' rogues they had.

"He come home the next mornin', and he says to me own good mama, God rest her, 'Mrs. O'Doyle,' he says, 'I'm afraid to go home and tell Ma I've been tuk by the police.' An' him eighty, mind! But that wasn't the whole of it," finished Mrs. Walsh, in a shrill tone of extreme relish, as they all laughed. "His mother put on her shawl, an' footed it down all the way to Belcool jail and she dressed them fellers down good, and learned them more than the 'Hail Mary!' 'You murderers!' she says to them, 'to take a widder's only boy, and run him in wit' thieves an assassins an' pickpockets overnight,' she says to them. 'It'll be a miracle if he don't go bad, with all the sin and filt' he's learned off thim!' she says."

"You never told me that one before, Ma," Maggie commented, in deep appreciation.

"Well, I don't know why I wouldn't be telling you, except that I was a very young child at the time," Mrs. Walsh responded, gratified. "She was an ould one, for you, an' still livin' whin I married the full of seven years later. It was very gratifying to see her step along to Mass, wit' her brogues held up bravely in her hand. Sure, this boy of hers was goin' on eighty whin this occurred. He passed me own mother, who was out in a little gardeen she had, spuddin' at a few cabbages that grew there, an' 'Oh, Mrs. O'Doyle,' he says——"

She rambled through the tale again, embellished it, her eldritch voice almost as soothing an undertone to this indulgent audience in the dreamy summer darkness as was the idle lap of the waves on the lake shore, the sound of frogs and crickets, the woodeny note of a distant owl.

"I guess Pop and John couldn't make it," Ellen observed, presently, after an actual silence.

"I guess not." Kate's heart sank. This was Friday night, John always came up on Friday night. That meant such a heartening assistance for Saturday's out-of-door lunch, such companionship over all the little problems, and in all the exquisite joys, of the happy country week-end.

And before her voice had fairly died away they heard the horn of the motor, repeated over and over again for the children's benefit, through the woods. There was an exclamation of pleasure around the table, and they lighted the bright electric lights that made everybody blink fuzzily, and shade eyes. John's foot thundered on the porch.

"No Uncle Peter!" Kate exclaimed then, in John's arms.

For he was alone, and looked white and strained.

"Yep, he's here, and everything's fine," John said, clearly, in a loud, unnatural tone. He put his wife gently aside, and went to her aunt. His manner was oddly excited and strange.

"Feeling pretty good, Aunt Mollie?" he asked, laughing with suddenly wet eyes.

"Oh, what is it, Jawn?" she faltered, clinging to him.

"Feel like hearing some good news?"

"Oh, dar'rlin'——?"

"John——!" Kate said, electrically.

"Well, then, keep cool. Sure you're all right? I've brought a week-end guest up to see you, dear. Hold on to her, Kate. It's good news, now, mind you don't get shocked! He's here with Uncle Peter—and Mart——"

"Oh, blessed Jesus preserve and protect us——" prayed Maggie's voice steadily in the background. "Oh, my God——"

"Oh, John—John *Kelly!*" screamed Ellen. "Not *Tom*——? Oh, Mama——"

"Tom," Kate said, laughing and crying with joy. "He's come home!"

CHAPTER XXV

TOM, tall, handsome, laughing, with one arm tight about his mother's shoulders while he divided his affection and devotion among all the others, was really home again.

The fire was lighted, the children sent to bed, and Mollie, quite naturally and pathetically, and with a little meek triumph, taking the second place in importance, sat down on the davenport, and Tom sat close beside her. Mollie, as the greatest sufferer to his going, was naturally chief rejoicer at his return, and now and then she was tearful, and even occasionally faint, in the overwhelming joy of it.

The others ranged themselves about, their faces utterly radiant, their gay laughter always ready to meet anything and everything Tom said. John was in a big chair, Kate on its arm, with her body resting against him, his arm about her, and her own arm laid loosely about his neck.

Well! It was impossible of course to talk consecutively or coherently. Everything was hopelessly mixed together, Cecy's vocation, and the funny speeches of the Swedish deck-hand on the ship that had brought Tom into harbour that morning, and Kate's marriage, and glimpses of Bankok and Rangoon, unimportant gossip of the Prendergasts, and details of San Francisco's municipal life were tumbled out indiscriminately, and interspersed with personalities.

"Tom, dear, you *look* so well! He's fat, isn't he, Mommy?" "Well, you could of knocked me down with a quill pen——" "All the way up in the train Pop kept saying, 'Maybe your mother's got wind of it, somehow!'"—"I *saw* that third man, coming up behind John, and I thought, 'Oh, *pshaw*, some business stranger——'" "Well, Mollie, you look happy enough now, sure enough!"

Happy! Mollie was more than that. She was solemnly and supernaturally exalted. A sort of radiant pallor lingered on her full, soft face; she kept her hand tight in Tom's, and assumed a girl's air of pouting and coquetry when he left her side even for a moment.

He wasn't married? Somebody put the question jokingly, and he answered it with a laughing negative. And Mollie lapsed still deeper into content. And he wasn't going away again. Oh, good Lord, no! Home and Mother for him, from now on. How about his old room, Mom, and how about his old job, Pop?

"Mart has your job, and he's a wonder," John told him, smiling.

"Had," Martin amended neatly, with delicate emphasis.

"But we'll find you a job, never you fear!" John added, to Tom.

"You're not going to put anybody out for me!" Tom assured him. "I can loaf around awhile." Kate, struck by some sudden thought, stared at him suddenly, speculatively, sent a glance to Mart. But Mart was not looking at her, and she turned her eyes to Tom again.

"Do you know what our pay-roll now is, Tom?" Martin demanded, interestedly. They talked of the business, of the Riordan "boys" still in the packing room, and the way little O'Brien had come up. O'Brien married to a widow eighteen years older than himself, with four children? Tom's great shout of laughter broke forth again.

Mollie listened patiently to the business talk, as she had listened to it for thirty years. Later, when at last they knew that they must separate for bed, she lingered on with him, and they talked of Paul.

Whirling sheets about, running to and fro with towels and soap, talking, talking, talking, Kate and Maggie and Ellen and Mart made comfortable provision for him.

"And sleep late if you can! Sunday we all have to get up at six-thirty, for the only Mass is at eight, ten miles away," Kate told him, when they were all delaying, and finding fresh

excuses for one more word—and one more. "But to-morrow this is Liberty Hall!"

John, Peter, the old grandmother, Maggie, even Mollie had by this time disappeared. But the cousins lingered on in Tom's room, and now Tom, cousin-fashion, put his arm about Kate and kissed her.

"All right, you beauty. Does John tell you now and then what a heart-breaker you are?"

"Oh, now and then! The upper pillow's hard, Tom, in case you want to read in bed, and the lower's the one to sleep on."

"Read in bed! My God, I'm asleep on my feet as it is!"

"Well, I was thinking of to-morrow night, too!"

"Tom, when does your box come?" Ellen demanded.

"I don't know. Some time. Ellen's not so worse looking, is she, Kate?"

"Not when she's clean, no," Kate answered, in the familiar old phrase of Irish motherhood. "And the boys—kinder—like Ellen!" Kate said, with a laughing glance. "Ah, Tom, it's nice to have you back again!"

"Here I go!" Tom warned them, tearing off his coat. "Stay at your peril, females!"

Kate and Ellen fled, laughing. Kate found John still awake, in their own simple, pine-scented bedroom, with Rosemary sitting bolt upright and interested in the curve of his big pajama sleeve, on the bed.

"John Kelly! Do you wonder I can't ever train one of my babies? Look at her now! Oh, you bad girl——"

"She bust her water bottle, and her crib's in a mess," John explained.

"Oh, John," Kate's hand was at her heart. "She cut herself!"

"No, apparently not. I heard the smash, and caught her out of it before the thing fairly happened. I remembered poor Frank and his thermometer, when he was the baby——"

Kate, brisk, capable, superb, in her fresh, full blue gingham, hurriedly made matters right. John and the baby contentedly watched her as she smoothed and straightened, spanked the

diminutive pillow, refilled a new bottle from the thermos one, and snapped the rubber top into place. The screen was replaced, the old steamer plaid hung upon it, and Rosemary whisked back into her crib.

"What about a little m-i-l-k?" John queried. "It's after one."

"Let's see how the water goes——" Kate droned, swiftly undressing. Later, when it had been ascertained that Rosemary had gone soundly off to sleep, like the good baby she was, Kate told John what she really thought of Tom.

"He's coarsened, somehow."

"Well, that might have been partly the clothes, Kate. He doesn't seem to fit into them yet. You should have seen him when he walked into the store! In a black shirt, with no tie, and the funniest looking checked suit—a sort of Norwegian blue —that I ever saw in my life! Uncle Pete and I took him out and fitted him up from head to foot."

"He's broke, I suppose?"

"No, apparently not. Although he let his father pay for everything, cheerfully enough. But he talked about having money—some money, on him. He got good pay; he was second mate, you know."

"John, does he remind you of any one?"

"Well, yes, I know what you mean. There's a funny likeness to somebody—I was wondering who it was. Those things strike you, after an absence, I suppose."

"I know who it is," Kate said. "Uncle Charley."

Her eyes and John's met squarely, and John laughed briefly.

"That sort of affectionate pompous way, it's Uncle Charley *over* again!" Kate pursued. "Lofty and superior—oh, my dear, I know it too well! I know what's kept Tom Cunningham wandering and drifting over the world for more than five years!"

"You're smart, Kate," her husband said, simply. "But you must remember there is a lot of drinking among sailors in seaport cities, and in the Orient," he reminded her. "He's home now, and he'll pull himself into shape in no time. Anyway, isn't it good to see how happy Aunt Mollie and Uncle Pete are?"

"Aunt Mollie said to me to-night," Kate said, "that it was worth it all! I wonder if the time'll come when she can say that about Paul, and Daisy, too? I say it, I know," Kate added, musingly, "when I pass the old Library, and remember myself drudging away in there, cooking suppers in that smelly storeroom—I'll never forget the time I left a banana in there, and had nine million ants trooping over the place!—and crying at night for fear I'd never have clothes and good times like other girls.

"My hands are terrible!" she interpolated, rubbing them with cold cream. "And stopping at Wiseman's for bread, can't I smell that little corner grocery yet!" she went on. "Old Wiseman grinding coffee, and the place smelling of onions, and that oily smell of the paper that comes around sugar barrels, and the old green and pink tea-boxes that said 'Suchong' and 'Best Mixed.' And I thank God for every moment of it—he's gone to sleep," Kate added, softly to herself, as John gave audible proof of deep slumber. "God bless him, he gets so tired! I wonder," she mused, composing herself on her own pillow, and stretching a hand for the little volume of Thomas à Kempis, "I wonder if I'm getting Aunt Mag's gift of the gab? Here I am talking away to myself——"

Tom, eventually to resume his old duties in his father's store, or such fragment of them as the increased business made expedient, was to have a long holiday first, finish the last of the summer months with Ellen and Kate and his mother and the children, up in the mountains.

These were happy days for them all. Mollie grew younger, firmer, gayer visibly, under their eyes, and Peter's deep satisfaction in having Tom home again was secondary only to his delight in his wife's transformation. Grizzled, stout, simple, aged somewhat himself, Peter would sit regarding them in silent content for long minutes together.

"Something like, Mama?"

"Oh, Papa, if we can only be thankful enough!"

The children, at first won by the utter novelty of this brown and loudly laughing relative, presently restored their allegiance

to Uncle Mart. Ellen, deep in a secret love-affair, at eighteen, gave him only the surface attention that her own burning affairs left free. But the other women surrounded him with a constant atmosphere of devotion.

In the soft fragrant mornings he helped his grandmother, who was scornfully attempting to establish some sort of a garden under the wild pines. Mrs. Walsh had small patience with primitive frontier life. "They'll yell over a wild weed, mind ju," she said in an undertone to Tom, "that any Turk could pluck up out of the woods, and then set one of their big brogues smack on me little Lady Washin'tons!"

He helped Aunt Maggie, who satisfied her conscience under all this "imposition" on Kate's hospitality in the labour of making the young Kellys' endless rompers, by sitting beside her, with desultory fragments of his own story always ready to shock and amuse her. He was tender with his mother; she was once again the "Mollie" of his loving impudence.

But it was above all with Kate that he lingered, and the remembered fascination of her old girlish personality, and the fresh charm of the new, cast their spell strongly about him again.

"Where are you off to, Catherine Monica Gertrude Walsh Kelly?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, hear him remembering my old Confirmation names! I wonder I didn't take Rita and Gemma, too, and make a job of it! Where am I off to? I'm taking the French laundry, and these Turks of mine, and a couple of the Prendergast small fry, down to the village, for the mail, and some rock salt, and to have their hair cut, if the barber's not too busy, and to get Hong Kee some meat!"

"Me too!" Tom would suggest. Opening the hood of her motor-car capably, to inspect the engine with a menacing eye, Kate would grin at him hospitably, as he and the baby got into the front seat. She loved to have him go; she was the most gregarious of creatures. A crowd of her own people always meant a good time to Kate. "Let's *all* go!" was her motto, and although it might be to the dentist or to the dressmaker, it was always thus turned into a festivity.

"Oh, come on, Tom, that'll be fun! Now, the whole crowd of you get in the back there with Biddy, and take turns with the jump-seats. Yes, take the baby, Tom, I adore having her!"

Mollie might wander out, among the sweet pines and the little shabby wooden cabins. Fog usually lingered here in the warm, dreaming mornings, the children wore their sweaters, the surface of the Lake was hid.

"Are you goin' with Kate, Tom?"

"I have to send a telegram, Mom."

"Oh, if that's all, you could 'phone it."

"The 'phome's bust again!" Mrs. Walsh, straightening a cramped old back, and gesturing toward the main house largely, with a loamy trowel, might remind them.

"The 'phone's broken," Tom, ignorant of the fact until that instant, would repeat to his mother.

"If I'd known, I might of gone in with you," Mollie would reproach them affectionately, with her new little exacting air. "I like your gall, running off with my big boy, Kate!"

"I'm one of these dangerous married women, I tell you, Aunt Mollie! Did I smooch my nose, Tom?" She would bring her exquisite face, with the firm apricot colour glowing in the cheeks, and rings of chestnut hair pressed down against her glorious, black-lashed blue eyes, close to his. "Was there ever anything in God's world as heavenly as that baby?" she would ask, simply. "Are you going to sleep in Uncle Tom's arms, you beautiful angel? Could your mother eat you at one big bite—these elastics are getting tight around her little legs, Biddy," Kate might add to the nurse, as unconscious of Tom's immediate proximity as the baby herself was. "She's getting to be such a monster!"

Playing with him, working with him, seeing him constantly, she studied Tom, and perhaps was surprised at what she found in him. At thirty he was still handsome, but there was a certain looseness, coarseness in his beauty now, a certain hint of fading already. There were fine lines about his eyes; he was pale, with a suggestion of dissipation in his pallor. He was an easy, pleasant egotist, contemptuous of domesticity, superbly impatient of the children's claims, not sincere even with his mother.

"You got out of that very nicely," he would congratulate Kate, as they drove away. And although she had been quite conscious herself of putting off Aunt Mollie, who was always willing to accompany them, even to intrusion, even to boredom, she did not like him to speak of it.

And he had lost his faith. It was all "bunk," it was all amusing hypocrisy, now. But this he did not let any one see, and he spoke of it only to Kate.

"You still keep all that up?" he said, good-naturedly, when she emerged from her own room, after the children's prayers, in which Mollie, Maggie, Ellen, and the old grandmother piously joined.

"Keep it up?" But she wouldn't let him see how shocked she was. Tom's was the usual attitude of the detached young man. The boys who married young got all their faith back, through their wives and nurseries. Tom's was a familiar type.

He mustn't be scolded, he mustn't be argued with. He would "come back" safely some day. Meanwhile one only smiled at him, only "gently admonished him."

"Tom, the women you love best in the world are religious women," Kate would remind him. And when he cut her to the heart with reference to organized religion, its commercialized side, its law-suits, its wealth, its worldly aims and pretences, she only answered that all human undertakings are tarred with the same brush. "Look at the government, Tom, the schools, the railroads—abuse of power everywhere! If the affairs of the Church had been perfectly administered, we would have had the Kingdom long before this, wouldn't we?"

"They caught you young, Katie!" Tom would answer, laughing. Sometimes the thought of his contempt for the intelligence of praying women stung her, but not often. Poor Tom, whose life had been so pitiably thwarted and wasted, it was not hard to be generous to him!

"Katie, do you ever flirt?" he asked once, teasingly.

"Do I ever what?"

"Flirt. Have crushes."

Her beautiful face flushed indignantly.

"Tom, I *loathe* that kind of talk!"

"Then you're different from most women to-day, darling."

"I don't believe it! Flirt! I'd just as soon go back to dolls after having my own living dolls," Kate protested.

"That's your Irish blood," Tom observed, after thought.

"I don't know what it is, but I'd just as soon put another little boy in my Frank's place, or in Jimmy's place, as another man in John's," she said. And he knew that it was true. Kate's early married life was as much an advance upon her flirting days as they in their turn had been upon childhood. Her life was full. She had no wish to go back to the lesser thrills and doubts of courtship.

More than once they spoke of Babette. Tom had not seen her in all the years since the day when he set her down, in her thin brown linen frock, outside the crowding bloom of her mother's garden.

"My God, Kate, if you knew what I went through when I got her last letter!" he said one day. "It seems like a dream now. There've been other women since—there was a little widow I met in Sydney——"

Kate frowned faintly. She did not want to hear about the other women. Even to have them mentioned hurt Tom in her eyes. Coarse to want them—coarse to mention them, opening to her eyes a glimpse of a world of "sin." How horrible life could be!

"But she was the first woman I ever consciously loved," Tom added. "It could have been you, Kate—easily. You and I were all lined up for an affair when they packed me off to Paris."

"I suppose we were," she conceded, thoughtfully, with a surprised smile.

"Then I met her, and she—she knew the ropes, which neither you nor I did——" Tom continued, dreamily.

They were sitting upon a slippery carpet of pine needles, on a slope above the Lake. Through the rough trunks, and under the low tasselled branches, the still water shone blue—blue in the sunshine.

"I met the brother, George Garberg, the other day, and we

had a chat," Tom presently continued, throwing a cone at a chipmunk, poised with upcurled bushy tail a few feet away. "She and Newman have been perfectly happy; they have a little boy. They live in the East somewhere, Cincinnati, I think—I don't remember."

"Would you care to see her, Tom?"

"Oh, Lord no! I can imagine her. George said she was fatter —— Oh, Lord, life's funny!" Tom rolled over on his side, laughed, and began idly to toss sticks and cones toward the water.

"I almost died for her," he said. "I went down to the waterfront that night, you know—the night I got her letter, and got rip-roaring drunk."

"You came to the Library first, you remember?"

He looked at her suddenly, surprised. He did not remember.

"I did?"

"Oh, certainly you did!"

"I don't remember that. H'm! I don't really remember shipping—there were days and days at sea. I was a sort of assistant cargo master. Sixty a month, I remember that. Kate, the feeling I had for that woman was like a poison—I couldn't get away from it!"

"I can imagine." She only had to think of herself as separated from Frank, Jimmy, Rosemary—the frenzy of it. "My children—my children are in that burning house—let me by——"

She turned pale, in the sweet afternoon sunlight and peace under the pines, with the children and Biddy only a few feet away.

Or suppose the baby, Rosemary, were out on that relentless blue expanse of water—the little hand clutching, the little blue romper plunging and struggling—Kate a poor swimmer—no rope——

Kate shuddered violently. "God!" she whispered, under her breath.

"Tom, it must have been terrible!" she said.

"Ah, you've no idea. Wherever I went I knew she wouldn't be there, and it seemed to take the very heart out of me."

"But, Tom, you knew we were all so anxious—you knew Aunt Mollie was grieving for you so——"

"I know. But it didn't seem to matter, somehow. I got to Rangoon, shipped again—I liked it, as far as that went. Then this old lad that was going to Tahiti took me along—it was all more or less fun. If I had it all to do over again I'd go on the wagon—that's what kept breaking me up. I had quite a lot of money at one time——"

"Well," Kate predicted with her sunny smile, "now we'll have you marrying some nice girl, one of these days, and settling down."

"We don't seem to be marryers, we Cunninghams," he answered, with an indication of an indifferent yawn. "Cecy a nun, Mart hanging round that school-teacher of his—she'll never marry him——"

"Lizzie Daley?" Kate was interested. "Why not?"

"Well, she's older than he is, to begin with, and tied down to that old father and mother of hers. She's cracked on religion, I imagine. Anyway, Mart said something about her making a novena about going on a picnic with him——"

"Oh, Tom, she couldn't have!" Kate laughed, scandalized. "I don't believe Mart can really be in love with such a—such a bony, cool-looking, pious sort of girl," she added, uncertainly.

"No accounting for tastes," Tom said, airily.

"No," Kate agreed, in a more decided tone. "But it's you who will have to marry, Tom, and give Uncle Peter grandsons," she added.

"All right," Tom consented. "You find me a wife half as lovely and smart as you are, Kate."

She only smiled maternally. His compliments made no impression upon her whatsoever. Tom, appreciating this perfectly, nevertheless was astonished afresh at the fact every day. She was not a worldly minded woman, not material in her ambitions, yet actual, tangible things seemed strangely to possess her nowadays. The Kellys were prosperous, Kate had a great deal of money and authority, and she enjoyed the administration of them. The spiritual side of her children's welfare was

of first importance to her, but even that she took in a human sort of way, the goodness and piety of the young Kellys was highly desirable, from a worldly point of view—they must have it.

Of *course* little Frank and Jim and Rosemary were the sweetest, best-mannered children in the world, wisely fed, charmingly dressed, more fortunate than other people's children. And the goodness and prayers went with all this; Kate's life was quite unthinkable without the lovely fact of her holiness.

To the idea that any outsider, any man, be he as handsome and as charming as he would, might admire her in anything but a cousinly, neighbourly way, would not have shocked Kate, but it would have amused her deeply, with a sort of scorn.

"The poor idiot! Doesn't he know that I'm married—— Take that out of your mouth instantly, Jim, and bring it to Mother!" Kate might have said. And her next speech would have been something like, "Aunt Mollie, feel his forehead. Does he seem the least tiny bit warm, to you?"

Even John, Tom realized with a sort of impatience and resentment, was no longer Kate's lover. He had been graduated, relegated to the comfortable, unromantic position of "Daddy," a person to be deeply loved, innocently deceived as to the children's sins, babied and consulted alternately, managed every instant of his life from now on. Kate needed men in her life no longer; they were only admiring accessories now. No hint of passion would ever stir her again as did the mysterious disappearance of Rosemary's Roman sash, or the rapturous prospect of a picnic with all the children, on the shore.

A pity! he thought. She'd grow stouter now, and if she were still scrupulously neat and clean in her dress, she would not be so careful to be pretty. Tom imagined the Kellys as the sort of simple devoted folk who take a troup of children in their teens round the world; they'd go to Lourdes and Rome and Lisieux, he thought, and curled his lip.

He pitied her. And all the more scornfully because he could read in her kindliness, her generous hospitality, her quick defence of him in any family argument, that she pitied him.

"What have I done, to be so fortunate?" she would ask him, as they wandered idly after the children, through the summer woods.

"Oh, you're fortunate, are you?"

A quick flash of her maternal, smiling disapproval.

"Ah, Tommy, don't be naughty! You know I am."

"All right, if you like it," Tom conceded, in genial dissatisfaction. And he sometimes assumed a slightly superior and lofty air toward Kate and John, as a bachelor who had evaded all their humdrum responsibilities and duties, as well as their spiritual inhibitions.

But actually he was better than his words. He went to church with his mother faithfully, dropping carelessly upon one knee beside her and leaning his handsome forehead upon his hand when the bell rang, and listened respectfully to the carefully planted stories of conversions and miracles that she and Allie arranged to bring under his notice. They felt that their darling had only strayed away from his old childhood's faith in a superficial sense, and told each other that he would be the first to fight for it when occasion arose.

Tom had his old room, and in the autumn began to go down to the office every day. He had no special duties at first, but was merely feeling his way. And in October came the first break. Tom disappeared for three anxious days.

It was Uncle Charley, pompous and entirely adequate, who found him in a waterfront billiard room, consorting with a dreary company of derelicts, in a little parlour behind the supposedly closed bar, and who brought him to his grandmother's little cottage, and sent for Kate.

Kate got hold of Mollie at once, and Tom was transplanted to his own comfortable room, with a little touch of what Kate diagnosed as dengue fever. "Dengy fever" was thereupon added to Mollie's vocabulary, and covered many an awkward occasion gracefully.

For Tom was sensitive about these little breaks in the regularity of his life, and there was never any mention made of them before him. Mollie and Allie would gladly have died rather

than hurt him as deeply as any reproach, as even the most tender allusion to his weakness would have hurt him. And Peter, looking at the aging wife who so blindly adored her first-born child, and remembering Daisy and George and Paul, remembering Cecy in the convent, and that the years would surely take Ellen and Mart away, fell in with the charitable conspiracy.

At intervals of ten weeks or three months Tom would grow moody, irritable, unlike his lovable self. Mollie saw it, Allie saw it, they whispered about it, they telephoned Kate. And Kate warmly, and quite casually, telephoned Tom. How about coming out to dinner, she and John were having a little party.

But Tom, after struggling darkly to answer her normally, and after laughing and kissing his mother a little too noisily, and warning her not to pull so doleful a face, would vanish again. And then they telephoned Charley, who became immediately efficient, and promised to get hold of the boy at once.

Mollie would telephone Tom's doctor, the silent, dark, clever Robert Costello, who had been an upper classman in Tom's freshman days. She would turn down the big bed, see to ice and hot-water bottles, wait anxiously—anxiously. One day—two days—that was nothing! Any telephone message might be Charley, saying that he and Tom were on their way home. After three days, and Allie and Mollie took turns at leaving the house, one always there on guard, the other to return breathless from church or shopping downtown.

"Did Charley telephone?"

"Not yet he didn't, Mollie. What is it, Nelly?"

"Mr. Walsh is downstairs with Mr. Tom, ma'am, and he says——"

Ah, the blessed relief of having him back again, of getting him comfortably into bed, of assuaging the first terrible onslaughts of headache and fever! Mollie and Allie could have sung for content as they passed each other in the halls. Another bout over, and who knew but what it'd be the last, or at least the last for a long, long time. They darkened the room, went in and out noiselessly, tut-tutting gently when he moaned, sometimes smoothing the restless, tossing black head.

In twenty-four hours he could have black coffee, a bath, a shave, he could sit up in bed, looking pale and broken. He could have the evening newspaper, make Ellen laugh when she carried it in to him; he asked for the new magazines. He played "Dominoes" with his doctor.

"Gosh, Mom, they certainly poisoned me that time!" Tom would say, penitently, when Mollie came to sit beside him, sighing, and holding his hand in her soft big one.

"Oh, but dar'rlin', why do you touch the stuff at all?"

"I don't know, Mom. I'm done now, for life. I don't like it, and I don't need it. I could always leave it alone! But you know how it is, in a crowd of fellows——? However, I'm *done*. Good-*night*."

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say so, Tom!"

"Pop mad at me?"

"Oh, no, dear, for well he knows it's the dengy fever in your veins that makes it so hard for you. I'll send him up!" And Mollie would pad away to find Pete.

"This is awfully hard on your mother, my boy," Peter, if he chanced to be in a generous mood, would reproach his son mildly, taking the chair she had vacated.

"I know it, Pop, I feel rotten about it. But it sort of comes over me. Maybe when I've been home longer——"

But if Pete was intractable, panic held the big house.

"Pete won't go near 'um!" Mollie would breathe, agitatedly, to Allie, passing her in the hall.

Allie need make no answer. The situation soon became too familiar for need of words. Bad feeling between father and son, Pete's brow like a thunder-cloud, Tom insouciant and ugly, conversation at meals almost dead, and the fear of an outbreak making the women's hearts beat in thunder-claps at the least untoward word.

This for two or three uncomfortable days. Then Tom's patient interest in his father's business, his unquenchable wit and fun, his voice at the piano, the accident of Kate and John coming to dinner, elaborately unconscious that anything was wrong, would clear the sky again. And then for a few weeks, or

a month or two, all would be well, and the handsome, indifferent Tom Cunningham far more in demand socially than ever his steady-going brother was.

Martin was quietly, deeply in love with Lizzie Daley, a hard-working plain young school-teacher almost four years his senior. The affair so enraged Mrs. Cunningham that she never mentioned it; Lizzie was anathema to her, she had not the slightest patience, and she pretended not to have the slightest interest in the whole affair.

When Mart appeared at the dinner table sleek and freshly dressed, shaved and brisk, intending, immediately after the meal, to see his girl, the only form of social initiative he ever developed, his mother was magnificently scornful.

"Oh, you're goin' out, are yu?"

"I guess so, Mom."

"It must be something very important, the way you've rigged up for it?"

"Lizzie." Martin would reach for a roll.

"Lizzie?"

"Lizzie Daley, Mother dear." Mart's young face would be a mask of patience and endurance.

"Oh, is Lizzie Daley," Mollie would ask, mildly and innocently curious,—"that's the Creels' cousin, that looks so pale as if she didn't eat good,—is she having a party?" she would add, musingly. "You'd wonder a school-teacher in the primary grades could afford to pay the price of entertainin'——"

"Leave him alone, Mollie!" Tom might warn her, good-naturedly.

"Leave who alone?"

"Mart. You know he likes Lizzie!"

"Who does? Our Mart? But my goodness, she could almost be his mother, couldn't she? Wasn't she teaching ten years ago?"

"Oh, cut it out, Mom. That's not fair!"

"I don't mind it in the least," Martin might say, briefly, with a level glance. He had an extraordinary power of self-control, was far less emotional than either Tom or Cecy, and possessed

almost no sensitiveness. The Walsh tendency toward garrulousness and excitability was entirely absent from Martin; Mollie felt less affinity with him than with any of her other children.

She resented Peter's dependence upon his reliability and judgment.

"Wait until Ellen here makes up her mind, and I'll retire on me laurels, and you and I'll go to Rome, and call on the Pope!" Peter said one day. "John'll be glad to put Mart in as second vice-president—Mart and Riordan practically run the city department and all the local business now!"

"Mart!" Mollie said, sharply. "It's very funny to me the way you all bolster up that child! What's Tom to be doin' when all this fine managin' comes to pass!"

"Oh, we'll find room for Tom, Mollie!" Peter assured her, good-naturedly. On the day this conversation took place she paid one of her rare visits to the offices and store; walking about in her friendly fashion among the staring clerks, many of whom knew her, and anxious to see "Mr. Tom's office."

"Have you got 'um squeezed in here in Joe Riordan's place like the elevator boy?" she demanded, humorously, of John, who walked about with her.

"Well, he's getting his bearings, Aunt Mollie. He's not sure yet what he wants to do."

"Lucky you if you get 'um," Mollie said, with significance, to the elder Riordan. "He's got a head on him, that one." And to Martin, whose name was modestly lettered under Riordan's now on the door, she said chidingly: "It don't look very good, Mart, your standing in your brother's way. Him with the dengy fever, and away from home so many years! You run things here to suit yourselves! I don't know what's come over Peter Cunningham that he'd let John Kelly and Mart have the say of everything," was her final discontented murmur.

"Peter'll lose every red cent he ever put into the place, and bring us all to roon!" said Allie, upon this point anxiously, in a family conference later.

"Look at the Boyles," Maggie added, lugubriously. "Drivin'

past in their carriage every day of the world, a matter of a few years back. And what'd he do but buy real estate somewheres! Now she has a sign, 'Rooms— Table Board', in her bay window. God help the poor soul."

"Aggie Boyle had an ulster in her roof," old Mrs. Walsh contributed, animatedly, "and the doctor that she called in to see would he fix it told her that it was a little tumour she had. And this on the top of her mouth, mind ju, where every sup of coffee or tea she would be takin' would make her lep like the Ould Boy himself——"

"And she says to the doctor that she'd have to go to the City and County for the operation," Maggie added, dolefully. "'For,' she says, 'I don't know where I'd get a lot of money for operations and dear knows what,' and with that——"

"Don't *do* that, Maggie!" interrupted her mother, forcefully. "Whin I'm tellin' Mollie a thing, who is it but you that'll break in and bust the whole point of me story on me."

"Well, I was just thinkin' how rich the Boyles was, and how they come down in the world," Maggie answered, mildly, without resentment.

"Well, leave Peter Cunningham look to it, or he'll be in the same fix," was the final consensus of opinion, uttered heavily by Allie, who had been supported by Pete for all the almost sixty years of her life, yet who was keenly anxious and concerned for her bread and butter at irregular intervals.

Now she spent many a sleepless night worrying about it all. If Pete lost everything, then Kate's household went down to ruin, too, and what with Ellen dependent, and Mart made penniless by the common calamity, and this big house like a white elephant on their hands, and poor Tom unable to do anything regularly, why, what on earth would become of her?

Allie began to talk somewhat bitterly of the large sums of money she would have had comfortably salted away in the bank, had her years of faithful service been given for a salary, instead of for love.

"He'd pay a housekeeper sixty a month," she would tell Maggie. "Call it seven hundred a year, for I'd have to put some-

thin' in the plate, and pay my carfares. Seven hundred a year for thirty years, I'd have thirty—I'd have more than twenty hundred—wouldn't I have twenty thousand dollars to my credit? And what have I got? All I get is to say, 'Pete, have you a ten?' or 'Pete, I'm chargin' shoes to you——' Sure, I could buy flats, and live in the one, and rent the other, and do good."

"Kate sends us a check every month of her life," Maggie would answer proudly. "And John would no sooner be down than he'd be up again—he'll always be fair by us."

And wrangling comfortably back and forth, as to Peter's shortsightedness, and the probability of a financial crash, interspersed with odds and ends of gossip, the two would spend a comfortable afternoon.

CHAPTER XXVI

KATE, with her nursery flooded with sunshine, and the laughter of little children, sparkling with flashing bath-water and spattering drops, strewn with small trays, bibs, porringers, pink blankets airing, and small rompers stretched on tiny hangers, answered her upstairs telephone with a dripping and hilarious baby rolled carelessly in a big crash towel and resting comfortably on her hip.

"You're speaking of Mr. Cunningham? Tom Cunningham, you mean?" she said, presently, with a worried frown.

"No. Miss Cunningham," persisted the voice at the other end of the wire. Kate wondered why her unseen conversationalist stopped for something like a flicker of laughter.

"*Miss* Cunningham? Miss Ellen? But I thought you said this was the hospital? Here, take the baby, Biddy," Kate said to her nurse, her face very grave. "Miss Ellen's been hurt and taken to the hospital—— Did you say she had been in an accident?" she asked, anxiously. "Is her mother there?"

"She's had an accident, but not serious, and she's at Saint Mary's, Biddy," Kate told the nurse, worriedly, hanging up the receiver. "I'm to see her, and tell her mother. ~~My God~~, what a shock for my poor aunt! I've got to go straight to the hospital. I can't get hold of Mr. Kelly—he went to Oakland this morning —— As if Aunt Mollie hadn't *enough* to worry about——!"

With her heart sick with fear, she was swept away from the joyous scene of little Rosemary's ablutions, from the white cribs and woolly bears, the toddling children and the delicious morning duties, to the big clean wards of the sanitarium.

Ellen hurt? But it somehow didn't feel true. Kate walked into the little office, loosening her furs as she went, and asked, with a whitened face, for Miss Cunningham's nurse.

The undergraduate nurse who was at the desk looked at her

with sudden, but not pitying or sinister, interest, and remarking mildly that "Sister" wished to see her, disappeared. Immediately Kate found herself confronted by the capable directress, whom she slightly knew.

"Come in here, Mrs. Kelly," said the nun. And when Kate had followed her into a clean little empty waiting room she asked with a keen look: "Had you any idea that your cousin was ill?"

"Ill? Why—but no! Isn't this extraordinarily sudden?" Kate stammered. "Isn't my aunt with her? She was at home last night, I know!"

"You didn't know, Mrs. Kelly," the other pursued, "that Ellen—I've known her for years, you know, she had her tonsils out here—that Ellen was married?"

"Ellen Cun——" Kate sat down. She shut her lips, swallowed, and put one hand over her mouth, dazedly.

"She was married to Doctor Costello last Easter, more than ten months ago," the other woman explained.

"Married to Robert Costello! *Ellen!*"

"Yes, they said nothing about it—I don't know why," Sister Stephen went on. "But this morning at about eight she entered the hospital, and at nine her little girl was born. She had no complications, everything went smoothly. I didn't identify her until I peeped in, on my regular round, half an hour ago. She had been asleep—— I'm afraid this is a shock to you," the sweet, [illegible] voice broke off to say, sympathetically.

"Well, Sister——*Shock*——" Kate echoed, faintly. "Well, *that*—" she said, in a mere breath of a voice—"*that* beats anything I ever heard in the entire—— *Ellen!* Ellen Cunningham married! Why, but she's only eighteen! She'll not be nineteen until April!"

"I knew she was very young," the nun agreed, pleasantly.

"Young! But not one of us had the slightest *inkling* of this!" Kate stuttered. "My aunt will be—— But really I don't know what she'll do!"

"I talked to Mrs. Costello——" began the directress.

"I thought his mother was dead—she is dead!" Kate said, amazed, in the pause.

"I mean Ellen," smiled the nun.

"Mrs. Costello—Ellen! Holy Mother protect us!" Kate murmured.

"I talked to her, and she is very happy—very confident. She wants *you* to tell her mother," the other woman went on. "And as it is apt to be a good deal of a shock to Mrs. Cunningham, perhaps it would be as well for you to speak to her."

"Oh, may I see her?" Kate's face was bright with sudden interest. "And the baby?"

"For a few minutes. It probably will quiet her down, although I must say," said Sister Stephen, "that she shows very few signs of strain."

She piloted Kate upstairs, and Kate tried to persuade herself that it was not all a dream: the clean, steam-warmed halls, the bright winter sunlight glimpsed in long airy wards, the wrappered man wheeled by her, the whiffs of green soap, ether, early luncheon trays. A child's acid wail drifted from beyond a closed door; "temper," thought Kate, instantly classifying it. "But he probably has had enough to put a saint into a temper, poor mouse!" she added, in her sympathetic heart.

A white door in a row of white doors, a darkened room, a straight, exquisitely lean young figure stretched under a spotless linen sheet. Ellen——!

"Kate—you adorable angel——"

"Well, Ellen——" Kate said in the last tone of utter stupefaction. She tumbled furs, bag, gloves on a chair, sat down, and dropped her hand over Ellen's hand. Words failed her.

"Kate, are you surprised?"

"Surprised! What on earth do you *think* I am?"

"Kate, did you see my daughter? Five pounds lacking half an ounce. Not so bad, considering that she wasn't supposed to arrive until March, and this is January. Take a peek at her as you go out!"

"Sweetheart," Kate said, gently, utterly bewildered. "Does Aunt Mollie know anything of this? Am I to tell them? We must talk, for they'll turn me out in a minute."

"Oh, no, they won't," Ellen returned, confidently. "Not

until I say so. I can't have another pillow until day after tomorrow, but I'm perfectly grand. Don't worry about *me*. I've had tea, and I'm going to have oyster stew to-night. If you knew how tickled I am to have it all over—I was dreading the last few weeks, when you're so uncomfortable! And my dear, every time Mama or Aunt Allie looked at me these last months, I've nearly gone through the floor!"

"Ellen, for heaven's sake, tell me when you were married!" Kate begged.

"Well," Ellen commenced, with enjoyment. "You knew Rob had a crush on me? Oh, my dear, when I wasn't but sixteen years old, and was engaged to Jimmy Dale, at school, it began. Rob simply—well, it was love at first sight for *him*. He was over there at the hotel, and they called him in, and there he was! I was crazy about Jimmy, and I asked Rob to take me driving—he was thirty-two then, you know, he seemed old to me—and let me see Jimmy! He wouldn't do that, but he was awfully nice and sympathetic. Well! So then up at the Lake, when Jimmy acted so silly, and we didn't like each other any more, Rob began to come over to our camp now and then, to 'see Tom'!" Ellen finished, with a significant laugh.

"I remember hearing him mentioned," Kate said.

"His aunt, you know, whose husband and two boys were drowned before her eyes," Ellen continued, indifferently, "has brought him up. She was a little nutty, I guess; anyway, she made him absolutely," Ellen widened her eyes, "absolutely gunshy of girls!" she added. "He couldn't marry while she lived, and she didn't die until a week ago."

"Oh, she's dead, is she?"

"Oh, yes, now she is. But meanwhile, one day last spring, just after Cecy entered, when Mom and Mart and I were up at camp for Easter, I was in Truckee waiting for a train, and Rob had just arrived, on his way to his aunt's camp. So we got talking, and I told him I was cracked about him, and he—" Ellen reddened, dimpled, raised explanatory eyebrows, "he talked," she summarized, briefly. "So we got our license, right

then and there, and were married that afternoon; three days after my eighteenth birthday, and everything was fine! We said we'd take a chance about anybody finding out, and nobody ever did. And the fun!" Ellen added, brightening, "visiting places together—and twice he stayed with us overnight, and nobody suspected! And then all winter we lunched together whenever we could—his aunt was dying, and we thought she'd surely die before this happened!" And Ellen indicated her hospital room with an eloquent shrug and glance.

"But, darling, your father and mother will be furious—will be so hurt——" Kate suggested, reproachfully.

"It can't be helped, Rob says," Ellen responded, cheerfully. "Oh, Kate, if you knew how excited I'd be last winter," she broke off, amusedly. "Mama telling me not to flirt, and to be a little lady, and perhaps the hostess chaperoning away like mad—and all the time a married woman! We were both on a few house-parties, in Oakland at the Deanes', and in Piedmont—it's been perfectly peachy!" Ellen ended, ecstatically.

"Ellen, darling, what a silly mad thing you've done!" Kate said, tenderly. "Where on earth is Doctor Costello to-day?"

"Ah, well, that was the funniest part of it!" Ellen said, gaily. "You know he was up at the house last night, and he and I and Mart and Tom were playing 'Five Hundred.' Tom thinks he comes to see him! He went off to Los Angeles at ten—his aunt died there, and she's left him tons of money. She never had the faintest suspicion, so now it's *all* right," Ellen said, with satisfaction. "And the minute he got back, which is day after to-morrow, we were to tell you all!"

"But, darling," Kate said, regretfully, "your mother will never forgive him! Why, he's twice your age! I can't think what possessed an honourable man, and a doctor, and an old family friend, to do such a thing! It was so unnecessary."

"It wasn't unnecessary at all," answered Ellen, who to Kate's dull astonishment—for Kate began to feel herself what she afterward described to John as a "saturate solution of shock"—was now manicuring her pretty hand idly as she talked. "You know the way Mom acts about everything! Look at

her with Tom, and with Mart and Lizzie! There would have been fuss and flurry for five years. And Rob's aunt," Ellen concluded, peacefully, narrowing her eyes to inspect the fingertips she stretched at arm's-length along the bed, "would have found out, and she never would have stood for that! So it was the only way!"

"Well, if Aunt Mollie'll only forgive you——" Kate pursued, still anxious.

"Eventually she will!" Ellen said. "Kate, do make them show you Patricia! I'm going to name her Patricia—don't you think that's cute? Is five pounds pretty small? She's two months ahead of her appointment with me—she's a prompt little thing, I'll say that for her."

"Ellen, how did you get here?"

"Nothing simpler. I woke up at six, and began to feel funny. So I lay there thinking how I'd tell Mama. And suddenly it came to me that this was the place for me, and I got dressed and walked out. You see, they can't all get at me here. If Mom makes a fuss they'll turn her out. I passed Grace downstairs, dusting—this was about half-past seven—and told her to tell Mom I'd gone to church, and would have breakfast with you."

"Mrs. Costello——" the nurse said, pleadingly. She was a pretty young nurse, and evidently highly delighted with Ellen's achievement.

"Ellen, you're wonderful!" Kate had to say, departing. So pretty, so cool, in her impudent little Chinese silk pajamas, as gay a little mother of eighteen as a sunshiny winter morning ever saw. "You should have seen *me* with my first baby. Sixteen hours of the inferno, ether, collapse, preparations for a better world——!" Kate said.

"Oh, they gave me something to sniff!" Ellen returned. "But before I really got excited I heard Patricia cursing like a little trooper, and then everything was glorious! Now, Kate, write down Rob's address, and wire him, and break it as gently to Mom as you can; she'll blow up, but it can't be helped. She'll make Papa swear not to come and see me, but you tell him on the side that I want him to sneak out here and take a peek

at his grandchild. I was going to name her Mary Peter, but Rob said it sounded nutty to him. Take a look at her, Kate, and jack them up if they're neglecting her! She's Rob over again, from the one look I got."

Kate, out on the sun-washed flight of steps again, stood staring for several long, bewildered minutes at the rounded twinkling tree-tops of the long Park front, the motor-cars flashing busily to and fro, the street-cars humming and throbbing, and marketing and baby-wheeling women gossiping in the pleasant winter sunlight.

Life, to a healthy young woman who had time to spare from her own for the problems of others, could be fascinating, Kate thought. Safe, snug, and warm, behind her, was Ellen Cunningham Costello, placidly anticipating oyster stew, and the diminutive, yet healthily snuffling and saffron-red Patricia beginning what might be a life as long and as changeful as Grandma's.

And ahead, the big Howard Street mansion from which a little daughter had escaped "to church," a few hours ago, proceeding peacefully upon its morning way; blinds drawn, furniture dusted, maids murmuring in the dining room; Aunt Mollie ponderously padding into the sewing room; Maggie, who was sewing for a few days for Mollie, arresting the busy treadle of the machine to gossip; Allie basting together the strips of gilt braid and heavy moire silk that would some day be vestments.

"To a telephone office, and then to Mrs. Cunningham's, Jerry," Kate said to the chauffeur, her manner still absent, her tone vague. How to begin, she pondered, as the car began to move. Aunt Mollie, I have some very funny news for you? Aunt Mollie, what do you think has happened?

Actually in Aunt Mollie's big room, where Aunt Maggie was giving her sister a shampoo, Kate thought of a better method.

Mollie was in a big chair, looking up meekly, as Maggie tossed the thin grey locks on a big towel. Allie sat on the foot of the bed, detailing the last hours of a mutual friend.

"So Frances went over on the Thursday, to see could he keep it down," Allie was saying. "An' she took a cup of it in to him, and she says, 'Papa, it's my chicken broth——' Hello, Kate."

"Well, Kate, what brings you out at eleven o'clock?" Mollie asked, through thin strings of drying hair. "That's what Doctor Mhoon would for ever say to me, if he'd meet me downtown," she added. "'You the mother of young children,' he'd say,'and stravagin' the streets before the shadders turn.'"

"That was a great expression of my Uncle Tom's," Allie contributed, smiling fondly. "'The turn of the shadders' was for ever the way he'd say 'afternoon.'"

"Listen, good people," Kate said, brightly. "How does it happen that not one among the whole crowd of you has noticed that Dr. Robert Costello has been falling in love with Ellen?"

Mollie flung back the wet hair, stared at her heavily.

"Rob Coslow and Ellen?" she demanded. "Why, whatever's come to you, Kate?"

"Doctor Coslow?" Allie demanded, also incredulous to the point of pity. "Why, all he ever comes here for is to see poor Tom, when the dengy fever's upon him."

"Well," Kate said, hardily, "you're a bright lot, and I've some news for you!"

"I thought you had," said Mollie, significantly, with a look that embraced Kate's figure, in its loose fur coat, as well as Kate's radiant face. "And I'm surprised at you! You've only just got your stren'th back, after the last——"

"Oh, it's not me this time!" Kate answered, laughing and flushing. "Although I didn't think anybody was going to be surprised any longer if it were! But it's Ellen——"

"Her and Robert Coslow?" demanded Mollie. "Why, he's older than Tom. He's all of thirty-five."

"Twict her age. It's all foolishness," Allie said, disapprovingly.

"Oh, now don't say that, Aunt Allie!" Kate began, eagerly. "If they love each other! He's tremendously prosperous, and absolutely straight and respected."

"He's a dark-spoken, sour one for you," Maggie offered, simply. "You'll never get a bright word out of *him!*"

"His mother died on him when he wasn't but a young boy of three days," Allie recalled, "and it's made him very dry and

cold. 'Another time, consult me,' he'll say, very bitter and sharp to me, if maybe I carried Tom up a taste of crab salad or whatever! 'Oh,' I'll say to him, 'didn't old Doctor Pawlicki, that you got your first trainin' with, remark to me that a natural-born nurse is worth ten of you young doctors with your diplomas and your little chin-beards.'"

"Oh, come now," Kate pleaded, "he's a fine fellow. And if Ellen loves him——?"

"Loves him?" Mollie echoed, roundly, with scorn. "A lot that young one knows about love! I'll have her over my knee if there's much more of this."

"Well," Kate said, in the silence, with her spirits rather damped. "This was as much a surprise to me as to you, I assure you. How we've all been so blind I can't see! But the truth is that Ellen and Doctor Costello were married awhile back——"

"~~My God~~ in heaven!" Mollie whispered, as she paused.

"Yes, indeed they were!" Kate went on, glad to be getting it said. "They've been keeping it secret for months."

"Katie—don't fool her—look at her!' Maggie besought her niece, glancing at Mollie, who had indeed turned deathly white.

"Why, but gracious!" Kate said, with a cheerful, half-impatient laugh, "there's nothing so terrible in *that!*"

"Pete'll shoot him in his tracks!" Allie predicted, in a tone of quiet conviction.

"There'll be blood shed over it," Maggie agreed.

"God forgive him, for I never will!" Mollie added, solemnly. "The one girl I had left, when God took away my little Daisy, and Cecy went off on me. Her father'll have the law on him, and if the Pope himself has to cancel the whole thing, it'll be done when Pete Cunningham gets started, let me tell you!"

"Now, Aunt Mollie dearest, be reasonable. I think it was a silly thing to do," Kate argued, kneeling now, with her arms about the straining figure of her aunt; "all secret marriages are absolutely idiotic! But there was his aunt, you know, that old Mrs. Tobin, who left him dear knows how much money, and

was a little crazy, I believe. Anyway, he didn't dare risk marrying while she was alive. And then Ellen being so young——"

"In the first place, it's all a lie!" Mollie said, in a loud, clear voice. "The idea of a feller like him, with a face like a rock on him, tellin' you such a story! Where's Ellen? Somebody 'phome Pete, and leave us get to the bottom of all this shenanagan!"

"Ellen and Rob Costello slipped off to Truckee one day last spring, you remember, after Cecy entered, when you were camping up there a few days with Mart, to get in the Easter vacation?" Kate continued her story. "And ever since, I imagine she's been trying to tell you—but you know what a funny little thing she is! Lately," Kate added, impressively, "she's had a very good *reason* for wanting you to know."

"Oh, Kate, never say that!" Maggie pleaded, faintly. "Roonin' the child before she's fairly grown up."

"Ruining nothing!" Kate echoed, staunchly. But she was frightened at Mollie's stricken face. "Whether it was a wise way to do it or not, there's no reason why they shouldn't get married! They went to a priest, and as far as I can see, Ellen doesn't care for anything in the world except her husband. She was as calm as a clock this morning!"

"God knows it's hard to bury them," Mollie was beginning, in a hard droning voice, her eyes fixed straight ahead of her upon space, her plump hands upon her knees, her full, faded face somehow made more pathetic by the dangling, still damp hair. "But I'd rather see a child of mine laid out in her shroud——"

"Oh, Aunt Mollie, *don't* take that attitude!" Kate protested. "There's nothing disgraceful about it! Ellen has her senses, she's perfectly capable——"

"Don't defend her, Kate, she's rooned her own life, and disgraced her family!" Maggie chided her niece sharply.

Mollie lay back in her chair with closed eyes.

"Katie——" she whispered, long pauses between her words. "Only tell me, dear, that—that what you said—about——

Say that's not true, Kate! That the last one the Lord spared me—an innocent child—wasn't lyin' and deceivin' her mother all these months——"

"Darling, she's happily married, and I just telephoned Uncle Pete on my way here to come home and congratulate you!" Kate said, steadily, in a reproving and bracing tone. "Why, Aunt Mollie, I never saw you so silly! Now, just *come out of it*," Kate directed her forcefully, "and begin to use your good sense! Do you realize that Ellen's dear little girl was born this very morning, and that she's waiting for you——"

"And at that," said Allie and Maggie, telling the story a thousand times, afterward, "Mollie turned the colour of lard, and fell back kind of, against the chair, and Pete come runnin' into the room. 'She's killed her mother!' he said to Kate, and Kate took it upon herself to lay into the whole crowd of them. 'You're acting like a pair of fools, savin' your presence,' she says. 'Here's Ellen got a good man for herself, and a fine baby——'

"But indeed," Maggie and Allie would finish mournfully, "husband or no husband, child or no child, Mollie'll never forgive the either of them! Her heart's broke entirely on her. 'Never speak her name to me again,' she says. And when poor Tom come home sick the next week, didn't she have us send for Doctor McCarthy?"

The parents of Patricia Costello, however, took the attitude of Ellen's mother with a light-hearted indifference that secretly astonished Kate. It was hardly believable that a child could have had the devotion and care that had been lavished upon Ellen, for the eighteen years of her life, and so readily and simply be severed from the source of it.

Peter, after a week's painful mental struggle, and directly against the command of his wife, went out to the hospital to see his daughter and grandchild. He never told Mollie.

He sat clumsy and gentle beside Ellen, and Ellen laughed exultantly, and kissed his hairy, freckled, kind hand, and nursed her baby quite unembarrassedly before him.

"Want to see her choke?" Ellen asked him. "She's too cute when she chokes!"

And Kate saw that her own agonies of anticipation, where Ellen was concerned, were all wasted. Her mother would presently forgive her, and until then Ellen would be entirely happy, and only a shade happier afterward. She already regarded her parents as delightfully old-fashioned and somewhat mistaken guides. Rob was her life now.

But before this Doctor Costello had duly arrived in the city, and had been whirled out to his wife's bedside. He gave Kate, who chanced to be with Ellen, an unfriendly and resentful look, and proceeded hotly to find fault with the way Patricia had been dressed, and with the fact of her too-early arrival.

Ellen lay grinning at him blissfully. She knew that this was Rob's way of proving that his heart had been torn out of his body with cruel anxiety and strain, and that she, Ellen, was the dead centre of his universe.

"There's no question that you did it running upstairs!" said Doctor Robert, sternly.

"None whatsoever, darling, I wanted to have a surprise ready for you!" Ellen answered, impudently.

"Oh, Baby Girl—Baby Girl—what a scare you gave me!" Kate heard the usually composed and cold man sob, as he sank on his knees beside Ellen. She slipped away. Ellen, she reflected, returning to her own household with the inevitable happy sense of going back to the sweetest place in the world, Ellen was like a little actress immersed suddenly in a new part. She retained but a dreamy and hazy memory of other responsibilities, and earlier days.

Ellen was in the position of the extremely youthful bride whose husband merely assumes the completion of her education, and a sort of transference of control. It was all a delicious joke to her. Her new name and dignity, her accounts at the big shops, her baby, her husband, her limousine, were simply larger toys to Ellen. She blindly adored her somewhat taciturn, reserved mate, but more than that she admired, respected, and obeyed him. She trusted to his advice in every-

thing, and lived merely to have Rob cuddle her and praise her.

Ellen presently had a house in Jackson Street, and servants, and a white perambulator over which Kate's old Biddy, who would deal no longer with the uproarious young Kellys, and pleaded for a "young infant that can't run all over the place on me," presided proudly. Kate saw her almost every week, her father infrequently, and her brothers only now and then, when they could run out to have tea in her beautiful drawing room, and feel themselves decidedly superfluous if the dark, silent, busy doctor happened to come in.

But Mollie never saw her, never mentioned her, except with quiet tears, and predicted darkly that the entire enterprise would come to grief, and "Peter be only too glad to pay their bills for the poor creatures, and give them a start somewhere, without all this talk of limousines and servant girls and what not!"

Ellen, however, whose personality had perhaps been overshadowed in the old home full of vigorous brothers and sisters, now rapidly developed a sunshiny egoism that saved her from any pin-pricks of Mollie's inflicting.

She always waited to have dinner with Rob, and if the cook didn't like the delay, the cook could go. She always drove Rob out to the hospital on operating mornings, and if Patricia didn't want to wait for a meal, she knew what she could do! "You can lump it, Miss!" Ellen, fumbling unhurriedly with the white ruffles at her breast, would assure the wailing baby cheerfully. She would not leave the city, for the cold, blowy months of midsummer, because Rob could not get away. And she proposed calmly to wean the baby in September, and leave the child behind while she and Rob went off for a month's holiday in the car.

"Yes, and you could learn a lot from her!" John Kelly good-humouredly assured his wife, when Kate reported this, as she did everything, to him.

"Yes, I know, I suppose I'm a fool about the children," Kate admitted, meekly. She was lying flat in bed, with Rosemary

planted with some small toys in the curve of her arm, and she now tipped her up, kissed the sole of a bare foot, and righted the baby, who had given but one surprised squawk, again.

"Ellen will never get *her* husband up at two in the morning, to drive six miles for a doctor, to come out of his good warm bed and tell her the child is snoring!" John said, significantly.

Kate laughed guiltily.

"The point is," she said, following some previous line of thought, "when this thing here is eighteen, and puts us over some high jumps, will we act as silly as Aunt Mollie?"

"I confess," John said, in the next interval of his shaving, "that I am at a loss to understand your Aunt Mollie! What satisfaction she gets out of being mad at Ellen—mooning about that big house of hers crying about Daisy and Paul and all the rest of it."

"What satisfaction does anybody get out of a family fight?" Kate asked, sensibly, setting little lambs in a staggering line on the bed. "Yet look at the people that have them! It's a silly sort of pride, I suppose, and, if you ask me, I think it's particularly Irish! Look at the Daleys—Joe's wife and Richard's haven't spoken to each other since the big Bazaar, and I suppose they never will. And what about? Because Rose had the ice-cream booth, and Helen asked if she couldn't have cones over by the grab-bag for the children! And look at the Dempseys—old man Dempsey never spoke to Gerald again just because he married at all, he didn't care *who*. And the Prendergasts have a brother they never mention, because it seems an uncle died, leaving them each a thousand dollars, and this brother had a will leaving everything to him, and didn't produce it until the others had made all their plans! And Mrs. Nolan was telling me the other day at the Sodality that Mr. Nolan had two sisters who got around the mother when she was dying, or something, and had her change her will —I didn't get it all——

"But Aunt Mollie's interested enough in it all!" she added, after a silence. "She cross-examines me about Ellen almost every day! You'd die to hear the scornful voice she puts on.

'Oh, is that *so?* She'll risk the child's life so that she can run off with him on a trip?' she'll say. But really, when I think of the way she interfered with poor Tom, and of what a pathetic failure *he's* made of life——!"

"Well, come now, he wouldn't be one speck happier married to his grass-widow," John suggested.

"Oh, I don't mean that—well, yes, that too! But years ago when he was my beau——"

"You say," John answered, delicately accenting the pronoun.

"They packed him off to Paris," Kate resumed, undisturbed, and conceding only an indulgent smile to his incredulity. "He came back madly in love, he got no sympathy, no help. Aunt Mollie didn't fill the house with youngsters, as *I* should do."

"A lot of good that would have done!" John interpolated.

"Meanwhile," Kate went on, now merely thinking aloud, and with no reference to her audience. "Meanwhile, poor Cecy falls madly in love with a man absolutely out of her circle—not to say class!"

"Well, Aunt Mollie couldn't help that."

"I think she could. I don't think Cecy should have been allowed to go down to San Mateo, to get mixed into that crew! You never will!" Kate assured the baby. "It came very near ruining Cecy's life," she added. "And now look at Aunt Mollie with poor Mart! Here he is deeply in love with a perfectly decent girl, and Aunt Mollie won't have her name mentioned!"

"Well, Aunt Mollie's simply become a crank, that's the long and short of it!"

"I don't think so. All mothers seem to act that way!"

"All mothers," John deduced neatly, "are cranks."

Kate stared long and thoughtfully at her daughter, and sighed.

"Yes, but that's not the answer!" she said, presently, half to herself.

CHAPTER XXVII

MOLLIE'S attitude, on the occasion of Martin's wedding, was entirely characteristic. She showed a sort of magnificent disdain of the whole proceeding, mingled with a weary resignation.

Ellen, at the cost, as she told Kate later, of a scene with Rob, was at the church, and for a short while at Kate's house afterward, for the wedding breakfast. Rob could not come—too busy. Tom, genial and kindly, was his brother's best man, and Mollie had a new plum-coloured silk gown and a hat handsomely ringed with purple ostrich tips.

The spring morning streamed with rain; the church was swept by grey veils of it, and a steady dripping filled in all the interstices of the service. Lizzie Daley, never a pretty girl, but rather one who was usually described as "sweet-looking," was ghastly in heavy mourning. Bereft, in one short year, of both the adored parents for whom she had slaved all her life, Lizzie was actually dazed, and had developed under the burden of bewilderment and grief a sort of stubborn endurance and quiet, baffling to everyone, even to Kate, whose house guest she was for a week before the ceremony. Martin, too, as Kate's eyes saw clearly, found the dumb resignation of his wife-to-be, her lifeless acceptance of all the sudden upheavals and readjustments, puzzling.

Kate had tried to coax her out of the wearing of mourning at her nuptial Mass. But Lizzie, turning an apathetic eye upon her hostess, only answered mildly: "It was a vow I took, Kate, that I'd wear black for a year after my mother and father died."

Of Mollie's captious attitude Lizzie took no note, because she took note of nothing. She cried a good deal, and submitted rather than agreed to the plans that were made for her.

These Martin had carried with a high hand. Lizzie's mother had died late in May. It was now early summer; Lizzie should give up her teacher's position in June, when the term ended. She must close her flat; house-hunt with him for an apartment whose associations would all be happier. The dreary rooms, where her parents had been dying for years, should be put behind her for ever.

Watching him, Kate marvelled at the mystery called love. What power held him to this lifeless girl with the long veiny hands and the mournful whining voice? Mart was handsome, prosperous, clever, rich; why was it that he was the one to plead, to woo, to adore, and that Lizzie should always have the air of attempting to withdraw, to cool his ardour, to evade him?

Lizzie was tall and thin; she had an intelligent, serious face, pale blue-grey Irish eyes, and a sweet, tender, tremulous mouth already chiselled by suffering well borne. Melancholy hung about her like a visible veil. While Kate displayed the beauties of her simple trousseau, and while Martin sat raptly admiring her, Lizzie quavered forth, over and over again, the bitter story of the night that "Mama" had felt so badly, and had suggested sending for the doctor, and that she, Lizzie—blind, blind, blind!—had tried to coax her off to sleep again without summoning him.

"Oh, Kate, if I could only have that chance over again!"

"But, my darling! Look what you had been to them both, just an *angel*—all your life. You mustn't go back and brood that way. We all can blame ourselves into insanity, at that rate! Look at poor Aunt Mollie with Paul, and with Daisy, too, for that matter. Your mother didn't die, then, and the doctor said the next day that if he *had* come——"

"Yes, I know! But I'll always see her lying there, when I thought she was asleep. I was saying the five sorrowful, and I didn't dare rattle the beads for fear of waking her! I laid them on the table, and I'd just move my finger on them from bead to bead. And all the while she was wide awake, and suffering that cruel pain!"

"Lizzie dear, you mustn't be morbid about it. Now, when you're going to marry a dear, good man who idolizes you."

"Martin says he thinks I ought to get married," Lizzie would submit, in a doubtful tone.

"Yes, and I think you ought to, too. You and he know each other well; you've been friends all your lives."

"I don't know whether I love him the right way," Lizzie said, dubiously, once.

"You don't know anything now. Your heart's too sore. But you knew it a year ago, didn't you? Before your father died?"

"Oh, sure," Lizzie answered. "We were engaged."

"Well! Isn't that enough?" But seeing the vague look return to Lizzie's eyes, and presently hearing the details of the terrible illnesses again, Kate would begin to feel a chilly little touch of doubt. *Was* it enough?

Martin, however, had no doubts. He was doggedly set upon winning his cool, tearful, sad-voiced wife. He packed his home belongings cheerfully, whistling under his breath, and made his arrangements at the office for a three weeks' holiday. He rented a sunshiny apartment in Sacramento Street, and dragged the apathetic Lizzie from one furniture store to another, buying blankets, kitchen utensils, rugs, with a definiteness and enthusiasm that made the women of his family secretly marvel. He opened accounts for Mrs. Peter Martin Cunningham at grocery, butcher, and dry-goods store.

"It would be funny, if it wasn't somehow so pathetic!" Kate, visiting her old grandmother, and discussing the ceremony, said on Mart's wedding-day. "I'd talked Lizzie into wearing white, you know,—just a white muslin she happens to have. Well! This morning, when I got up, I peeked into her room, and she was up, all dressed—this was seven o'clock, and the wedding was at nine!—and of course, in heavy black, saying her prayers. I *couldn't* argue for white," Kate added, "with the rain simply sluicing down! It was worse than this."

The old grandmother, Kate, Maggie, Allie, and Mollie were

all in the old kitchen of the Walsh cottage. Charley Walsh was at home, submerged in his dark, odorous bedroom, sometimes snoring, sometimes moaning with headache, and the women lowered their voices out of consideration for him. Harry, however, had a job in Portland, Oregon, and was, as his mother said simply, "doin' elegant."

At twelve o'clock in the morning the electric lights were lighted, for the spring storm was really of unusual violence and darkness. Kate had had Mart's wedding breakfast at her house, but somehow the little group of fifteen persons had failed to rise to anything like genuine wedding mirth. The bride had refused eggs, saying that everything "hearty" had "gone against her" since her mother died, and had sat silently and nervously sipping coffee, her black gown made even more funereal, Kate thought, by the large bouquet of violets and lilies-of-the-valley she carried. Ellen had left them at the table to be at home before Rob awakened; Thursday was his lazy morning. Mollie had surreptitiously wept, and Peter seemed dull and elderly.

It was upon Tom and Kate, and the always friendly and amiable John, that the real burden of sociability fell, and they struggled courageously with it. But it was a relief to everyone when Martin, glancing at his watch, warned Lizzie that they must be going, and when the married pair were escorted down the dripping steps under the big umbrellas John and Tom carried. They were to take an eleven-o'clock train from Third and Townsend streets, everyone knew, and Kate thought that if everything about the forlorn event had not been pathetic, Mart's little mystery as to just where he was to take Lizzie for the wedding night would have been supremely so.

When they were gone there was an immense sense of relief in the pleasant house, and the rain seemed somehow less of a calamity, and more of a reminder of the blessing of fires and snug rooms. Mollie, stout and uncomfortable in her new clothes, unbent somewhat, and became cheerful in the soothing company of Kate's three babies; Peter, with Tom and John, went downtown; normal life recommenced.

At eleven Kate went to market, and drove her aunts to the Turk Street cottage, where Mrs. Walsh, confined by a cold, was anxiously awaiting the details of the wedding.

And then for an hour, for two hours, they sat in the little kitchen gossiping, reviewing every minute circumstance idly, sometimes laughing until the tears came into their eyes, and Kate laid her bright head upon the scarred and discoloured table, where it had so often lain in laughter and tears so many years ago, and sometimes gravely and dubiously, as they analysed the strange apathy and coldness of the bride.

"I said to her at breakfast, 'Weren't the flowers in church lovely?'" Kate remembered. "It was all pink and blue stock, Grandma, and pink roses with blue delphiniums—you never saw anything look so sweet! And she looked down, you know that mournful way she has, and sighed and said, 'I had palms for Papa. But the nuns had it all decorated for Easter when Mama died, and they left it—it was all lilies and ferns!'"

"She was like Willie Mulvany, that drove O'Connor's hearses for year'rs," old Mrs. Walsh said with relish, after the laugh. "Well, he married a ger'rl from Oakland,—this was forty years agone,—whose sister was a Presentation nun, but I disremember the name; it was a name you wouldn't often be hearin' the sound of—was it Macmullen, now?" she mused. "Well, annyways, they was married at Saint Dominic's, and Willie had a horse and buggy ready to drive the ger'rl down to his aunt's in San Mateo, where they was goin' to stay a week. And didn't he go finely along the roads, talkin' o' this and that, an' the ould nag'd turn in at the cimitaries, and stop short at the tombs, and the poor young wife give a screech of laughter, and yelled at him, 'Willie! Where's this you brought me?' However," Mrs. Walsh ended, inconsequently, "they was very happy, and they had thim twins that won a prize for handwritin' in the Fair."

"For heaven's sakes!" Maggie murmured. "Kate, goin' to have tea?"

"Oh, I ought to go back to my children," Kate said, with a long yawn, laying her head on her folded arms on the table.

"I thought I'd run them all out to the museum this afternoon, and let them wear their little legs out——"

"They're much better off in their own nursery," Mollie suggested.

"I know it. But they get perfectly frenzied, a day like this," said Kate. "The last time it rained I bundled them all up, and took them down on the beach—the ocean was perfectly wild, and the kids adored it. They got soaked to the skin, came home and had baths, and were perfectly fine afterward."

"Well, that beats Banager!" Mrs. Walsh, scandalized, commented mildly. "Did Ellen look good at the weddin'?" she asked. Not that this point had not been thoroughly discussed, but in review.

"Stunning," Kate answered. "She was late, of course, and she rushed away from breakfast. But I imagine——"

She paused significantly, on the last word.

"Yes, I do, too!" Maggie agreed, quickly. "How old is the little girl—Patricia or whatever she calls her?"

"January——" Kate mused. "She's a year and a half old. Well, that's all right," she added, thoughtfully.

"She never comes in here," her grandmother said, resentfully. "Month in and month out, I never see that one! They was tellin' me her little ger'rl is very cunnin', with the cute little ways she has on her, but I'd never be one to swear to it!"

Maggie and Allie glanced briefly at Mollie, glanced at each other. And Mollie sighed heavily.

"She never comes near her papa and me," she said, sadly.

"She's terribly busy, Aunt Mollie," Kate defended her cousin, "and Rob hates to have her away from the house when he's there. You know what a doctor's hours are!"

"I suppose so," Mollie said, meekly, shrugging. "But never the day came when I was too busy to run in and see my mother!" she added. "Well, you bear them, and raise them, and then off they walk on you," Mollie said. "Ellen gone, Martin gone, Cecy gone—thank God, Tom's left to be a comfort to us in our old age. But he'll go next!"

Kate, who had been up with a croupy baby in the night, felt

sleepy and pleasantly weary, in the warm and quiet kitchen. She sipped her delicious hot tea thoughtfully, wondering whether to go downtown, now that she was this far upon her way, and get through some of the interminable shopping, or to go straight home. Mollie thought resentfully of her new daughter-in-law, "with about as much blood in her as a soup-bone," Peter had said, capturing a fine fellow like Mart! Maggie and Allie dreamed their vague, distorted maiden dreams of sewing, of maybe getting to church for a few of the Mission sermons, of meals, of other people's cancers and babies and quarrels.

"Never mind, Mart'll wake her up," said the old woman, suddenly, "and by Christmas time she'll be lookin' up saints' names for the mont' of July. Leave her have a couple of young children, and she'll forget whether they was pink lilies or tarweed at her mama's funeral!"

And the session broke up in a gale of laughter.

But Kate had a special, tender affection for Mart, to whom she had always felt the family was a little unfair, and she carried from his wedding a haunting impression of something pathetically young, helpless, and unhappy, in his eyes.

The more brilliant Tom had always eclipsed Mart in his parents' estimation, Kate knew, and indeed he was neither so magnetic nor so clever as Tom. But he was so simple, so sturdily good and steady, he had been such a miracle of tender understanding with Paul, that Kate thought him one man in a million, where real worth was concerned, and John confirmed her, as far as his association with Mart in the business went.

And to have Uncle Peter so glum, Aunt Mollie so inexplicably critical, Ellen indifferent, Cecy gone, and Tom merely amusedly casual about Martin's marriage; more, to have the bride herself so unresponsive and dull, cut Kate to the heart. She herself had taken the affair in charge, had attempted, with all the force of her personality, to infuse a little life and gaiety into it.

In vain. And even when the young Cunninghams returned from their rainy, cold wedding trip, and were established in the

Sacramento Street flat, Kate saw no particular reason for hoping better things.

Martin was quiet, cheerful, uncomplaining; Lizzie was just the same as before, tearful, patient, compliant, resigned. Anything less like a marriage, Kate reflected fearfully, could hardly be imagined.

Lizzie's Sacramento Street apartment was newly, completely furnished, everything was good and uninteresting. So many chairs, so many rockers, gas stove, Victrola. A table, a rug, a hat-rack in the hall. A framed picture of the Coliseum over the mantel, an oratory in the alcove of Lizzie's room, with a lighted wick in a red glass tumbler floating before a religious picture.

Lizzie's room; Mart's room. A flat, clean white bed in each. Kate elevated her eyebrows when Lizzie showed her the place, and when Lizzie by chance was called to the telephone Kate stooped quickly and investigated the tops of both beds. Both made up.

But she made no comment. There would be a baby some day, and then everything would straighten itself out. And if Martin found his wife, as he must find her, disappointing, at least Martin would be the most ecstatic, the most adoring father who ever held a child in his arms!

Occasionally Mart and his wife, by invitation, dined with Peter and Mollie. Once, in the fall after they were married, Lizzie gave her husband's parents a careful, lifeless dinner. Afterward she and Mollie sat silent about the gas-log with the woolly grey asbestos lichen fluffing gently upon it in the flame, while Mart and his father talked business and store personalities.

Kate invited them to visit her at the Lake, but they did not come. And when she and her troop returned to the city, she told John that there was just one place drearier to visit than Lizzie's house, and that was poor Aunt Mollie's house in Howard Street.

In the mansion where children's feet had echoed, and children's laughter, quarrels, studies, illnesses had made the months and years fly, silence reigned now. Mollie would come in from

shopping or church, find Allie quietly sewing in one of the big, handsome upstairs rooms, loosen bonnet strings and sit down to get her breath.

"How is he?" Mollie would jerk her head slightly in the direction of Tom's room.

"He seems fine. I think he'll be fine to-morrow. McCarthy said he wouldn't come back unless we 'phomed."

"Hear from Kate?"

"Yes, she 'phomed, and she'd just been talking to Ellen, and sure enough, there's goin' to be another in January!"

"You'd think she'd come in, and tell her own mother about it"

"Well, you would think so. But she's queer."

Silence. And the hum—hum—hum of Allie's machine. The snap of a thread and whir of the wheel. Then silence again.

"Would you French it, Mollie?"

"It makes it stronger."

Silence. Then a maid at the door.

"Will Mr. Tom have any lunch, Miss Cunningham?"

"Wait a minute, Mary. I'll run up and ask him will he."

"Ellen, dear, you don't mean to be," Kate said, "but you're terribly cruel to Aunt Mollie and Uncle Pete!"

"Where do you get this 'cruel' stuff?" Ellen demanded, good-naturedly. "I think it's the limit the way Mama acts to *me*. Here I am with two babies, busy as I can be—my husband an important man, working up in his profession——"

"But, darling, just to run in now and then? That wouldn't cost you so much?"

"Well, it would, in a way, Kate," Ellen reasoned, undisturbed. "You haven't any idea the way Mama acts when I do go. She sighs, and asks me where I've been and what I've been doing—she didn't think we should have another baby so soon, and when she came to the hospital—and she only came once!—she got the nurse into a perfect tantrum, and she talked so to Rob about my being young, and having a good rest, that he'll *never* forgive her!

"And then, another thing," Ellen added, as Kate, looking troubled, was silent. "The only times Papa is home are Sundays, when Rob always likes to go down to the country, and play golf and bridge, and I can't ask him to stay in town then! Or else Papa's home late in the afternoon, when the children are going to bed, and I'm supposed to be resting for dinner! I would go," Ellen finished, with a trace of her old sulkiness, "if Mama wouldn't *always* tell me how long it is since she saw me. 'It was the fifth of January,' she'll say. And if I speak of the children, she'll say, 'I don't see anything of them,' and sigh, and if I talk of Mart she always sighs, and says how quiet he's grown!"

"I know!" Kate said, with a desperate little laugh. "But at the same time, Ellen, she's your mother, and it seems to me it's your duty to go in, every week at least, and cheer her up a little, and bear with her if she's cross. *I* do," Kate added, seriously; "and last night I took the boys at about five. Uncle Peter was sitting in the downstairs room, in the dusk, and he called out, 'Is it you, Elleneen?'

"I know he loves me," Kate went on, glad to see, by Ellen's suddenly sobered face, that she was making an impression, "but when I went in he was really disappointed."

"I know," Ellen said, slowly, in a low voice. "I know, Kate. I really will, I'll make a point of it. But Rob," she added, regaining confidence with the mere mention of his name, "Rob has no patience with that *family* stuff!" Ellen said. "He says that just because people *happen* to have children——"

"Honour thy father and thy mother," Kate reminded her.

"My dear," Ellen returned, unruffled, "I do! Kate," she added, exhibiting the baby's hand, "look at the little white rolls of skin she has in her hands—she always has them! You know they might as well have a garbage man as a doctor for a father. Rob never pays the slightest attention to what I tell him about them! I think the child has leprosy!"

Kate, instantly diverted, took little Virginia Costello, two months old, into her experienced arms, inspected the tiny mottled palm.

"Ellen, you idiot! That's just fluff from the blankets! They all do that. Look how it rolls off," she said.

"Virginia, do you want me to give you another licking?" Ellen demanded, of her youngest born. "How dare you lie to your mother?"

And as she laid her young face, radiant with love, close to the little pulpy, unresponsive one, Kate forgave her everything. Each generation of mothers to its own responsibilities, thought Kate, and only silence and neglect, and the pitifully hoarded crumbs of life for the passing generation!

A few months later she asked the Martin Cunninghams to the Lake and this time Lizzie wrote that they would be glad to come. But on the appointed day it was only she who appeared at the little mountain station. Martin, she explained, would come up with John for the week-end.

Two or three days of Lizzie, silently puttering about after her, drove Kate almost to despair. Lizzie made herself useful, and was sweet, if silent and timid, with the children. Her bony, cool hands were always ready to help Kate with bed-making, with raking, with little meals, or little bathing-suits.

But she was so dreary! It was Mama again, and the terrible night when Lizzie had not summoned the doctor; it was Papa's cancer; it was Mary Dufficy laid out with her infant, in her shroud, and the Gerry girls keening over their father's grave.

On Friday, when the men were expected, Kate suggested that Lizzie move her belongings up to the little log cabin that was one of the guest-rooms, where Martin would sleep that night. Hitherto her guest had occupied a little room off the pine-walled sitting room, as less alarming for a lone woman in the silent mountain nights.

Quietly, stubbornly, smilingly, Lizzie said that she would remain where she was.

"It's less work," she said, mildly, busily continuing the pea-shelling that happened to engage her and Kate at the moment. But Kate noted that she did not meet her eye, and that her ear, under a lifeless loop of shiny brown hair, turned red.

"But, Lizzie, won't Martin think that rather odd?" Kate asked, after a pause.

"Oh, he won't mind!" his wife said, confidently. "He likes to read at night," she added, lamely.

Kate pondered. The moment was with her all through the happy, soft summer day, as she flitted about with fresh sheets and new cakes of soap, frowned over tiny splinters, and greased sunburned little faces. In the afternoon she said suddenly to her guest:

"Lizzie. Tell me something!"

Lizzie instantly turned scarlet, as with prescience. But she smiled gallantly.

"Are you," said Kate, her hands upon the other's shoulders, her beautiful face full of a sort of maternal concern, "are you Mart Cunningham's wife?"

"I don't know what you mean," Lizzie said, faintly, trying to appear offended.

"You know very well what I mean!" Kate answered, sternly.

For a second Mart's wife assumed an almost jaunty air of surprise and protest. Then suddenly she crumbled visibly, trembled, and put her hands over her face.

"Don't talk to me about it, Kate!" she said, with dignity.

"Don't *talk* to you about it!" Kate echoed, roundly. "That's just exactly what I *will* do! Lizzie, have you and Mart quarrelled?"

"We've never," Lizzie said, gulping, "had a word."

"Don't you *love* him, Lizzie?" Kate asked, one arm about her, her face bent close to the other's averted face.

"I think he's the finest man God ever made!" said Lizzie, thickly, with a gulp.

"But then do you mean to tell me——! But then——! But *why*——?" Kate demanded, completely bewildered.

"I don't think we should discuss it," Lizzie said, in a cold, reserved voice. She straightened herself, shook off Kate's hand, and turned away proudly. "It's a matter between Martin and me, and he understands perfectly," she said.

"It's a matter of a vow before God," Kate corrected her, sharply.

"Not," Lizzie defended herself, quickly, "not if a person has already taken another vow."

Kate regarded her steadily.

"Do you mean that *you* took a vow?" she asked, slowly, and their eyes met.

Lizzie stared at her face defiantly; her cheeks were very red. Not a muscle of her face moved.

"And then you got married?" demanded Kate.

"I didn't know anything about it," Lizzie offered, with the grudging air of one whose sacred privacy is being invaded.

"Yes, but you knew—you certainly knew that marriage—you knew that marriage wasn't—*that!*" Kate fumbled, with all the instinctive avoidance of her Celtic blood for the actual words.

"I tell you I didn't know anything, and it's my affair and Martin's anyway, Kate!" Lizzie said, goaded into anger. "Mama was never one to talk to me about marriage and babies and all that," she continued, in a slightly more conciliatory and faintly apologetic tone. "And there was no one else I could talk to. For all I knew, babies came——" She paused. "For all I knew, men——" she began again and paused again.

Kate knew that the indication of utter and virgin ignorance was true. Lizzie had probably known as much of marriage, upon her wedding day, as upon the day of her birth. Such subjects were utterly unknown, in the clean, pious, gentle circle of her early years. The aged mother would have been morally, mentally, yes, and even physically unable to mention them to her daughter. Books touching upon them, conversation through which they might become familiar, were abhorrent to purity like this.

Lizzie had taught primary grades all her life. But there was nothing in that well-thumbed little curriculum of greatest common divisor and Spencerian loops to open her eyes. She had very probably come to Mart, Kate reflected, believing

vaguely that the laws of calm logic and dispassionate decision would regulate her married as her single life.

"Lizzie, did Mart know this?"

"Oh, yes, I told him, the day of Mama's funeral, when he wanted me to marry him right off," Lizzie answered. And Kate detected a pathetic note of relief in her voice, as if she were glad to be speaking, even of the unspeakable, at last. "I told him I'd taken a vow, when I was confirmed," she pursued, "that married or single, I'd preserve—I'd do what I told you——"

"How old were you when you were confirmed?"

"I was twelve."

"Yes, and how much did you know about life?"

"Well, nothing, I suppose," Lizzie conceded. "But I read about plenty of the Saints that did that."

"You mean married, and then lived a single life?"

"Well, yes," said Lizzie, and fell into a mild silence, a silence with something almost triumphant in it, as if she had proved her point. "My own saint did that," she added, contentedly.

"Yes, but after she'd had four children!"

"Well, that wouldn't make any difference," Lizzie said, with a look of surprise.

"But, Lizzie, what about your marriage vow? The vow of an ignorant little girl of twelve amounts to nothing, you weren't even legally of age then! But the vow of a woman, who solemnly swears——"

"But Martin understood the whole of it, and agreed, beside my mother's coffin, that he'd let me have the say of it!" the other woman argued, readily.

"A lot *he* knew about it!" Kate muttered, confirmed by this remark in an old belief that Martin's youth had been as strangely innocent and protected as that of his wife, and convinced that his utter ignorance of the ways of woman was at least partly accountable for the whole state of affairs.

There was a look of serene and stubborn fanaticism in Lizzie's eye; Kate knew that look. It was the look of Cecy, of a hundred girls, smilingly putting aside the claims of home and kindred

to follow their own religious lights; it was the look of the invalid, fasting through the forty days of Lent, although her nerves and her increased infirmities cause a whole household suffering and inconvenience.

No logic would deal with Lizzie. An exalted passion for martyrdom possessed her. Her eyes shone with satisfaction.

"Lizzie, was this vow, as you call it, for life?"

"It was." Lizzie recalled herself to earth, frowned, sighed. "It was until a sign came from God," she said, simply. "Mart sees it as I do," she resumed, "and over and over again he'll tell me that I must do what I feel to be right! God only knows what a saint he is," Lizzie added, passionately, "and I hope God'll make up to him for all his goodness to me! There's never a harsh word out of him," she went on, eager to praise him, now that Kate could understand, "and there's hardly a time I go out to my graves that he doesn't tell me to take some flowers along, and be sure to get a taxi."

"And I hope God'll make it up to him by having Lizzie Daley fall down a sewer opening!" Kate said, disgustedly, to her husband, when the Cunningham visit was over and they were discussing the pair. "And sending him a wife with some sense! Wouldn't you know it'd be Lizzie, scared to say her shadow belongs to her, and older than he is, and not pretty, and without a cent, who would set up that kind of nonsense! And she's proud of it, John. It's a sacred vow, and the more miserably unsettled and unhappy it makes them both feel, the more proof she thinks it is of being right! You could talk yourself blue in the face, and she'd go right on smiling serenely."

"She's waiting for a sign from God?" John mused. "What do you suppose she'd regard as a sign from God?"

Kate stared at him steadily a long time. A strange little smile began to twitch at the corners of her beautiful mouth.

"Well, now, you interest me strangely, Mr. Kelly!" she said, after a pause. "I wonder!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE convent garden was old, and its trees had reached a mighty beauty that made everything in their neighbourhood picturesque. Walking under them, the white-robed figures of girls looked fairylike, and through their immense branches the summer sunlight that filtered into the garden had a concentrated goldness.

Beneath them lay the neat angles of the tennis-courts, the gymnasium's low roof, the blazing bars of border flowers, and the trim paths. No fallen leaves here, no disorder, no neglect. Watering sprays flung arcs of diamonds over the lawns; the fountains splashed deliciously in the hot silence of the long holidays. Sometimes, from the dense shadow of the heavy great leaves, a fig dropped to the ground, birds flashed warily and silently about the brimming marble pool that was provided especially for them.

The beautiful new gymnasium was far down past the grape-arbours, and almost buried by foliage from sight of the long convent building. Above its main doorway deeply cut in the Spanish pink plaster, under the dull pink Spanish tiles of the roof, were the words: "In loving memory of Paul Francis Cunningham," and the two dates that were so pitifully close. And beneath was the phrase: "The dove, finding no place to rest its foot, returned to Him in the ark."

And before the building, and up and down under the fig and pepper and the lofty, shabby eucalyptus trees, walked Cecy and Sister Superior.

It was a gala time at the convent, perhaps the most important in its proud history of fifty busy years. From far-away France, small and wrinkled and heavily spectacled, had come the little elderly Mother General, visiting all the houses in Australia and America and Canada on a long, triumphant tour,

and met everywhere with arches, and songs, and laughter and tears of joy. And it was to be Cecy's tremendous honour, with the other young "White Veils" who had, with her, borne their novitiate bravely, to receive her habit, and make her final vows, in the presence of this august visitor.

The convent had been decorated from top to bottom, songs had been composed, cantatas had been sung. The "children," as the scholars were affectionately called, had been rallied, even in vacation; the "old children," who were the alumnae, had gathered, with their own children and grandchildren, to welcome Mother General. Yesterday there had been a "Jubilee," ropes of starry Shasta daisies, masses of wilting sweet blooms everywhere, incense and the strains of organ music in the chapel, nuns and fashionably dressed women of the world, laughing with the ecstasy of children together over the lavish "refection" in the garden.

To-day Mother General was visiting the Stockton convent, and to-morrow would come the solemn ceremony at which twenty-seven girls, trained and disciplined by the slow hours of three endless years of prayer and sacrifice of self, would dedicate themselves for ever to poverty, chastity, and obedience, and the education of Christian youth.

To-night, some time between supper and chapel, Cecy must go to the Mistress of Novices, in her little office, and kneel, and to the elderly woman's kindly "What do you wish, my child?" must answer, "The habit of our holy order, Sister."

Some of the novices feared this as an ordeal, but not Cecy. She was humbly, gratefully eager for the moment. There had been storms in these long three years, but they were over now. Her heart, her soul, had found harbour. She was deeply, miraculously content.

When Cecy had written to her mother, in the early days of her novitiate, that "she had found a mother and sisters to replace those she had lost," it had been at the suggestion of the Mistress of Novices. That was the form letter; and Cecy's duty, in those days, had been blindly to obey. It had not been quite true.

But it was true now. Among these women who had sought, like herself, the cloistered life, it was natural that she should discover a thousand affinities. She loved them all. There were no quarrels in the convent, the rule of silence saw to that, and there was, at the daily recreation period, all the laughter, and the innocent joking of happy children.

The narrowness of the convent life was that of the camp, or of the castle, the community whose nearness and completeness eclipses all the bigness of the world. As to hospital undergraduate nurses the little rumour of a change of wards is more important than the sacking of a distant city, or as young lieutenants gather to discuss the possible holding, dispatching, or disbanding of battalions, and hear unmoved of politics and powers, so the nuns lived upon the tiny events of the day, and their hearts and souls were filled to the brim with the peaceful minutiæ of convent routine.

But it was minutiæ glorified and uplifted by the constant presence of the spirit, the whole-hearted humble idea upon the part of every one of forty good women to be better, to be kinder, more charitable, more forbearing. Their simple robes, that gave no avenue for vanity or competition, the exquisite physical beauty and plainness of their environment, their deep interest in the constantly changing current of the girls who went through their hands—the difficult girls, the good girls, the musical girls, the girls who would come among themselves as "White Veils" some day—satisfied them wholly.

Not every woman who wore the habit was happy, but many of them were, with the happiness that is not of this world, the happiness of the detached spirit, the woman who lives, and yet is sweetly and mysteriously dead, who drinks deep at the fountain of all lives, because she has lost her own.

All Cecy Cunningham's natural merriment, clouded by sulkiness or sensitiveness at home, had developed here. She had learned to laugh with enchanting gaiety at the simple greediness of a fellow-novice, at the blunders good Sister Philomene made in English. She had learned patience, when across her newly oiled refectory floor dear old Sister Simon had innocently

trailed a dripping pail of water. She had learned to turn obediently away from the fascinating work of replacing books on the dim, big library shelves, without explanation, without apparent necessity, and devote herself to some less sympathetic task.

She would be Sister Mary Nicholas, if—and Cecy's heart hammered furiously with fear at the "if"—if she received the veil to-morrow. Some of her associates had already had intimations of acceptance, and hints as to future employment. Bess Creary would be Sister Genevieve, and there were indications that she would be given the linen room, in dear dead Sister Juliana's place; Mary Muller would be Sister Bonaventura, and would certainly have a primary class to teach—she was a born teacher.

But Cecy had had no inkling of her own fate, and it made her a little more nervous as to her status as a novice, a little less self-conscious about asking for the black veil. Once robed, she would have no further fear! Duly given a trial, Cecy had not proved to be a particularly successful teacher; she grew too fond of the girls, and they on their side got "crushes" on her. Perhaps they would ask her to help Sister Adalbert with the music lessons; that would be pleasant, in the glass-walled cubicles that rang with scales all morning long.

Anything would be pleasant! Just not to be refused, just not to be kept out, when all the others were taken in!

The Superior had seized upon this day, a lull in between two full and thrilling days, to have a few minutes' chat with each one of the twenty-seven aspirants. Now it was Cecy's turn.

"Your mother will be here for the profession to-morrow?"

"Yes, Mother." It was part of Cecy's training never to say more than was required.

Silence. The nun's hands were slipped up to her elbows in the big, loose black sleeves, Cecy's were gripping her own nervously, in the loose white. Their rosaries rattled as they walked.

"Do you anticipate that she will regret your profession, if it should be accepted?"

"Yes," Cecy admitted, reluctantly. "My mother resents my being here, since my little sister has left home, and my brother."

"She has—two—at home?"

"One. My brother Tom. He hasn't been very strong since he lived down in Borneo."

"You wrote your mother that you felt it right to remain here?"

"Oh, yes, a full year ago."

"What does your father say?"

"My father!" Cecy's voice thickened only a shade, steadied. "My father's an old angel!" she said, impulsively.

"They came to see you on Sunday. Did they speak of it?" asked the sweet, dispassionate voice.

"Oh, yes, Mother, my mother always does! She thinks I ought to go home."

"I told you at Christmas-time," said the nun, "that I would not advise you. But let me remind you, Cecilia, that this is your last opportunity, barring truly exceptional circumstances, to leave us. I have been praying especially for you; we all have. But the final decision must be yours!"

"I have made it," Cecy said, quietly.

"You think your duty is not at home?" the nun said, thoughtfully.

"I know it is not. Mother——" the girl added, eagerly, and paused. Her face, flushed in its prim white bands, was radiant, and her eyes suffused. "When you say that, I hope that I am to be accepted!" Cecy faltered.

The nun looked at her dispassionately, a flicker of something like humour in her shrewd grey eye.

"And that would make you so happy?" she asked.

"Oh, *Mother!*" The rich shade, the blazing pools of light glowing in the old garden, danced into stars and arrows before Cecy's wet eyes.

"Yes, and suppose then I have to scold you again for arguing with poor Sister Thomasine, about—what was it, African lions?" asked the older nun. "You, who are one of my oldest

girls, and who know well that Sister Thomasine has not had advantages," she continued, keenly.

"I know," Cecy said, hurriedly and penitently. "I—I told her how sorry I was—that I was wrong——"

"Yes, but that's not perfection, Cecilia," answered the other, sharply. "That's not perfection! To hurt her feelings, and then glibly run to her, and say 'I'm sorry!'"

"I know it," Cecy said, very low.

"Well," said the nun, briskly, "and if you cannot teach, and have no special business ability, what are we going to do with you?"

"I don't know," Cecy answered, smiling.

"You helped Sister Rose in the sewing room last week. How did you like that?"

"Oh, very much, Mother!"

"Very good," said the nun. "Here come our dear visitors back, I just saw the automobiles," she added in a dismissing voice. "Run up to the chapel and say a little prayer, and be sure you find time to see dear Sister Aloysius before supper!"

"Ah, Mother——!" Cecy said, in ecstasy, knowing herself accepted. She fell upon her knees, and caught the two kind, hard hands to her lips. And the nun felt her fingers wet, as the White Veil fled away, dutifully obliterating herself in the path of her important elders.

The Superior joined the visiting Frenchwoman, and the two or three Superiors who accompanied her, and they walked slowly up and down the paths together, in the evening peace. The convent bells rang the Angelus, and the notes crisscrossed lazily in the soft golden air.

They interrupted their business conference about to-morrow to say the little prayer. Then the local Superior said:

"You remember, Mother General, when we all wrote you our different intentions, to the Mother House in Paris, that our intention here was that God would send us a good, strong, sweet Mistress of Novices, when Sister Aloysius goes to St. Louis in two or three years?"

"I do not remember!" said the Mother General, with a sympathetic smile glinting through her strong glasses.

"I think she has been sent to us, so we must put that as another answered prayer," said the Superior. "I was just talking to her! One of our own girls. Sister Aloysius has been watching her for a year, with this in view, and she is delighted with her. She is strong, intelligent, ardent—the perfect type."

"And her influence on the others?" asked the nun, keenly.

"Is remarkable. She has no idea of it," pursued the Superior, "I have been talking of putting her in the sewing room or the laundry."

"And she expects that?"

"She expects to obey."

"Ah," said the old nun, with a deep breath of satisfaction, "what a miracle it is—what a miracle it is! The spirit—it never fails and it never changes."

"This girl has had strong trials," the other said. "She was a beloved daughter, badly spoiled by home training. And the family even now are making it very hard for her!"

"Ah, these families!" laughed the Mother General. "What a cross they are, and how alike they are! In England, in France, in America, always the same! 'My mother doesn't want me to become a nun!'"

"My own mother told me she would never speak to me again," said the Superior, smiling.

"And mine!" added the Mother General. "Well, point me out your little Mistress of Novices to-night. It is the most important of offices. I should like to have a chance to study her. And then, after the profession to-morrow, send her to me!"

And ten minutes later, although Cecy did not know it, she had been selected for the greatest honour that could be bestowed upon her.

Cecy was kneeling in the chapel, rapt with ecstasy, utterly and wholly at peace. She was not conscious of the keen eyes of the old nun kneeling in a stall behind her, studying her. She felt as if she were floating in ethereal sweetness and light.

To-morrow night the long strain would be over; the clergy

would be gone, the streaming visitors; Mama, tearful and plaintive, Kate so absorbed in those singularly commonplace children; Ellen in her fashionable white frock and Paris hat. Silence, peace, would once again enwrap the beloved convent, the arcades and grape-arbours, the wide clean paths, the dreaming trees and oiled corridors, the airy, bare rooms so exquisitely ordered, the polished, candle-lighted glory of the chapel, in whose windows lingered the last golden summer light. And sister Mary of St. Nicholas would have her holy habit!

Cecy went swiftly, smilingly through the wide halls, her white veil flying back from her happy face, with its sturdy, childishly rounded cheeks and its peppering of golden freckles.

Sister Aloysius was alone, and she would not let Cecy kneel.

"No, sit here, my child. I was thinking of you. You have come to ask for the black veil?"

"Please, Sister."

"And this is your last night of the white one?"

"Deo volente," said Cecy.

"Deo volente! And have I been very harsh with you, my child?"

"Oh, Sister, no!" said Cecy, her heart bursting.

"You are very dear to me," said the older nun. "Do you remember that I said, after a Lent retreat many years ago, at Saint Elizabeth's, that you would come to us some day?"

"I always wanted to!" Cecy said, smiling. And she believed it. The memory of Dion Taylor had faded into the far-ago, unreal background of her life, with the measles and her broken arm, and her little sister Daisy. Within her heart was deep, unclouded joy.

A bell rang. Feet chipped in the corridors. Black veils, white veils, went to and fro.

"Supper," said the Mistress of Novices, rising. "Well, do you agree with me now?"

"The Kingdom of Heaven come to earth!" said Cecy, walking staidly at her side.

CHAPTER XXIX

"HOW I have kept my hands off that girl Lizzie all winter I don't know!" said Kate.

"Now, Kate," John warned her. "You keep out of it. You've been in delicate health this winter, and you have a delicate baby—that's enough for you, without butting into Martin's affairs!"

"I want to tell you right now, John Kelly, they'll separate!" predicted Kate, looking with such infinite love into the pale little face in the crook of her arm that it was possibly not all her imagination that the tiny Catherine smiled at her. "John, could a child ten weeks old smile?" she asked, diverted.

"You know more about it than I," John answered, flinging down his newspaper, and stretching in his big chair. The May night, in the high mountains, was chilly, but the cabin was deliciously warm.

There had been whooping-cough in Kate's nursery all winter, and concern for the life of more than one of her three, with the colds and croup that had followed. And at Easter the new baby had come, a delicate baby, coughing almost before she cried. Schooling had been irregular, and Kate's own condition, worn with worry and strain, unsatisfactory, and so John had moved them all up into the healthful piny woods, where the children were to run wild for a whole glorious half-year.

A roaring fire had been burning in the simple little sitting room all evening; it had died to pink ashes now, and the room was comfortably warm. The lamplight was golden upon Kate and her baby; the older children, with wild witch-dances in pajamas, had been herded an hour or two ago into an adjoining room.

"Your bedroom's like an oven!" said John, after an interval

of tending fires. "I hate to leave you to-morrow. Does he keep you in wood?"

"Keep me in wood—here, carry her in, she's gone off!" Kate answered, handing up the baby. "He buries me in wood! Tarantulas and ants stream all over the place, from the old logs that Chinese heathen drags in. And, my dear, it'll be spring in two weeks. We've wonderful trillium and iris now, and the currant's all out! I love it. Especially," added Kate, having darkened and made safe from fire the sitting room with the desperate swiftness of the sleepy, and now in her own room, and undressing rapidly, "especially as the baby really is gaining. Now, three ounces in a week—it's nothing, of course, to what the others did, but it shows that she's started! No, but really," said Kate, returning to her original subject, "really I am going to interfere between Mart and Lizzie, and I want you to help me!"

"That I'll never do; it's too dangerous, interfering between man and wife," John asserted, firmly, leaping into bed, pulling the covers up about his head, and eyeing his wife with shuddering satisfaction. "Br-r-rr! the sheets are like shrouds!" he said.

"Aren't they terrible?" Kate asked, yawning as she opened the casement window. "Oh, what a divine night! What a *night!* Really, it's worth your while to get up to see the moonlight on the redwoods. Like black lace! The whole thing looks like a park. I'll tell you the part I want *you* to play, later," she went on, serenely reverting to Mart. "It will honestly come under the head of charity, John, for they're both getting *queer*, actually queer. It was all very well last summer, it seemed to me a sort of joke. Lots of girls make those silly vows before they know what they're talking about, and then get sort of obsessed by them. John, the moonlight actually looks like snow on the roof of the old barn!"

"I don't care if it looks like corn-beef hash," John answered, simply, as the cold, aromatic night air, heavy with rain on leaves, fresh grass, and the scent of wood-violets, came rushing in. Kate laughed, flying about bare-footed from one room to

the other, leaping into bed only to leap out again, with a last inspiration regarding the boys' blankets or the draught straight on Rosemary's head.

When she finally crawled shivering in beside him, John was sound asleep. But he stretched a big arm out toward her without waking, and Kate, feeling the blessed warmth and relaxation penetrate to her very bones, went contentedly off to sleep with her mind full of plans for Lizzie and Mart, and her head where she loved to rest it, against his shoulder.

Lizzie came up in June; in her quiet, apathetic way, she apparently liked to be with Kate and the children. She was more reserved, more coldly self-contained than ever, and Kate felt some little misgiving as to her own plans.

But she broached the subject courageously enough on a glowing, silent Friday morning, when the early fogs had drifted high into the blue sky, when the Lake sparkled and shone in the sunlight, and under the great redwoods all sorts of homely camp noises: hammers, the splitting of wood, shouting of children, slamming of doors, echoed wholesomely through the sweet, piny air.

Lingering at the breakfast table, where they could watch the blue play garments of the three older children, the two women talked seriously for more than an hour, and Lizzie wept. Kate, who had her baby on her arm, did not spare her guest.

"I don't think you should talk to Martin about it!" Lizzie, wiping her eyes with the back of her wrist, and sniffing, protested in a hurt tone.

"I didn't. Good heavens! How can you think I would talk to Martin about it! All I have to do is *see* you both," Kate answered, promptly. "You nervous and quiet, Martin twenty years older than he was when you were married two years ago, both of you like a couple of old, old people! All I have to do," Kate added, significantly, "is see Mart go up to that little guest-cabin of mine at night, and you turn in here, in the spare room! That isn't married life, Lizzie."

"I don't care whether it's married life or not!" Lizzie burst

forth, desperately, after a silence. "Mart's working too hard at the office, and that's all the matter with him. It's our own affair."

Kate studied her thoughtfully. Lizzie had not grown handsomer in her thirtieth year; she was a lean, anxious-looking woman whose skin was already threaded with fine lines of worry and frowning. She had developed a spiritual super-sensitiveness, she was proudly and darkly stubborn in her unhappy stupidity.

About Mart's exquisitely clean, unattractive house she slaved like a humble bondwoman, dusting the ugly furniture, cooking the uninteresting meals. She would not have a servant, the lowlier her services for her titular husband, the better satisfied some strange, morbid instinct in Lizzie's virgin heart. She went to church, went to market, looked apathetically at the newspaper headlines, wept, brooded. At Communion Lizzie usually cried uncontrolledly, returning home to make her own coffee with a red-tipped nose and reddened eyes.

"Lizzie," Kate said, presently, watching her this morning, in her awkward resentment and ready tears, "you told me once that you would keep this—this thing you call a vow of yours, until you had a sign from God, didn't you?—— Frank *Kelly*," Kate interrupted herself to call sternly to her older son, "you put that straight back into the waste-basket! If I've told you once I've told you five thousand times that I *will* not have you children gathering rubbish out of the waste-baskets! Take it away from him, Sarah. Give it to Sarah, darling. Now look at your hands—all nasty ink! Go straight in—what the fascination of waste-baskets is, I really don't know," Kate added, mildly. "Well, Lizzie, to go back——"

"I wish to goodness, Kate, you'd not worry about me," Lizzie muttered. "There's nothing the matter."

"But, Lizzie dear, you can't go on as you are for twenty years, thirty years! You never see any one, you don't even go to see Mart's father and mother any more, you two have no life at all. And I tell you frankly, he'll meet some woman who *does* love him some day——"

"There's no one could love him better than I do!" Lizzie, forlorn and desperate, twisting her veiny hands, burst out.

"Well, he'll *leave* you!" Kate predicted.

"Then the sin will be on his soul, and not mine," Lizzie said, after a moment, in a desolate voice.

"I wouldn't be so sure! Anyway," Kate said, "this is what I want you to do. I want you to make a novena with me—nine days, that'll come out next Saturday," Kate added, with a frowning air of concentration. "Next Saturday! You and I will make a novena every night, and see if no sign is sent before then!"

"A sign," mused Lizzie, in a reluctant voice, "that I'm to break my vow!"

"Exactly, only it wasn't a vow," answered Kate.

They chanced to be alone with the children and Kate's old grandmother at the time, and Lizzie, perhaps untrammelled spiritually in the absence of the men, shyly told her hostess, two days later, that even so much prayer had seemed to help her strangely.

"And had you thought that Saturday, the day the novena's up, is the very day Mart gets here?" demanded Lizzie, a sad sort of awe in her eyes.

"For pity's sake!" Kate said, with an air of astonishment. All week long she encouraged in Lizzie a sense of mournful importance, writing John meanwhile that if ever there was a good nun spoiled, it was in Lizzie Daley Cunningham. "Nothing matters to her except a stupid sense of stubbornness, where a kind of half-baked piety is concerned. I doubt if she's worth the fuss!" Kate wrote, burdened and harassed as only the hostess may be by a heavy and dependent guest. "She ought to be under a sensible Superior, who would make her get off her foot!" And she signed the letter, "the sensible Superior."

Yet Lizzie was typical, too; she was by no means unique in her strange isolation. Kate thought of Myra Keating, agonizing over a fancied cancer for years, yet silent, because she had asked in prayer for her Purgatory in this world; she thought of her own Aunt Maggie, who had one day confided to her with tears that

she never would rebuke Charley and Harry because she had taken a vow that she would regard her brothers as "her cross." And Mollie Carey, who stubbornly, devoutly "offered up" one unborn child after another as sacrifices in connection with a long-ago vague girlhood prayer that she would never have a child that might live to commit a sin. Kate had seen poor Jim Carey, a baby-loving, simple man, grieving, growing grey and old, under the constant sorrow and disappointment. But in his wife's grief there was the same exultation that shone now in Lizzie's eyes, the flame of martyrdom.

"We Irish are a queer, unbalanced lot," she wrote to John, "but God knows what a cold, hard place the world would be without us!"

Martin and John were to come up to the mountain camp on Saturday afternoon. Tom was already there. It was customary for Tom to drive the larger car down to the village on Saturday mornings, and leave it there awaiting John, returning to camp in the service wagon that made the trip every day. John's hour of return was sometimes uncertain, and he liked to feel that nobody was waiting for him.

To-day Kate told Tom that he must take the little old Ford to the village, the big car was out of order.

"Don't ask me what's the matter with it," said Kate, "for whether it's one of those things that have to be scraped, or one of the things she 'hits' on, or the starter, or what it is, I couldn't tell you under chloroform. But anyway, she won't move."

"That's funny," Tom mused, opening the hood for long and vague investigations, tapping, rattling, adjusting, and directing Lizzie, who was fearfully installed in the front seat for the purpose, to advance the spark and the gas controls.

"Don't ask me to, Tom," pleaded Lizzie. "She may suddenly blow up and kill you!"

"For heaven's sake be careful, Tom," Kate added, with unusual uneasiness. She was standing watching them, her baby on her arm. "I'm as nervous as a witch this morning, anyway; I feel as if something awful was going to happen!"

"Don't ever say that!" their grandmother, straightening her

little old back, in its chocolate-flowered purple sateen, gesturing with a loamy trowel, and blinking at them from a face of the contour and colour of a walnut-shell, said solemnly. "I'm one for signs and warnin's," she added. "There's manny a wind has howled down my chimbly, and me sleepin' like the babe. But leave it onct begin to talk, chucklin' to itself like," Mrs. Walsh went, on impressively, "and there's death in it. An' last night, wasn't there a sobbin' little sound far up the chimbly?"

"Grandma, for heaven's sake!" Kate entreated, half laughing, half impressed. Lizzie looked genuinely terrified.

"Whisperin' and laughin' as if all the banshees of Drogheda was in it!" finished the old woman, triumphantly. "I yelled to you, Kate, if you don't disremember?" she asked.

"I don't recall Mr. Drogheda at the moment," Kate told her. "But why he should have a special bunch, or gang, of banshees, I'm sure I haven't the faintest idea."

"No, but you didn't, Grandma?" Lizzie implored, really frightened. "You didn't call Kate last night?"

"Indeed she did!" Kate answered. "But she said it was that her old blue comforter had slipped off her feet."

"That was me little inthrigue," said the old woman, much amused. "And I ast you, Kate, did you hear noises up the flue?" she added.

"And I said I didn't," Kate reminded her.

"An' you said it was some dir'rty crime I done, that was on me mind!" her grandmother added, with elation.

"And so it was!" Kate said, kissing the leather-coloured, warm old face.

"Don't push me little bonnet off me, Kate!" the old woman said, captiously, returning to her garden-bed.

Kate seated herself upon an upturned keg, studied Tom's efforts interestedly.

"Can you find it, Tom?"

"I'll be darned if *I* know what's the matter with her!" Tom, pale, romantic, his black locks sweeping in disorder across his white forehead, said disgustedly.

"I wouldn't take any chances," Lizzie said, warningly.

"Oh, take the Ford, Tom!" Kate said, carelessly. "Leave it by the station for John, come back in the service car. And send someone out from the village to fix this car!" And as Tom abandoned the big automobile as temporarily useless, the burning question arose, as was usual, as to whether Frank and Jim might accompany "Uncle Tom" to the village, to return in the service wagon with old Hong, the Chinese factotum, and whether, in case of their obtaining permission, Rosemary also might go.

In the end they all went, Tom returning with them, flushed and happy, in the service car, at luncheon-time, with a load of mail, ice, vegetables, meat, cases of ginger-ale, boxes of peaches, enormous packages of laundry tied with weak strings, and the new sandals, which all the small Kellys immediately assumed, dropping boxes, socks, old shoes, and wrapping paper everywhere in the process. With them came a mechanician to fix the large car.

But Lizzie, in all the confusion, was oddly silent.

"Kate, do you really feel that something awful's going to happen?" she asked once, waylaying Kate in the bedroom doorway.

"Well, I feel queer—nervous," Kate answered, quite truthfully.

"Do you believe Grandma really heard noises up the chimney last night?"

"Very likely," Kate answered, sensibly. "There was a lot of wind last night."

"Maybe it's just that we've been praying," Lizzie said, a little self-consciously.

"Yes," Kate conceded; "that does make me nervous. To ask for a sign, you know."

"Maybe we oughtn't to have done it!" Lizzie suggested, trembling.

"Oh, Lizzie, if we love God, and know He loves us, why should we be afraid?" Kate asked, and Lizzie was silent.

Three o'clock came, four o'clock, and the old grandmother

retired to her own somewhat remote cabin for her daily nap. Kate had just said that if Mart and John had managed to catch the one-o'clock train from town they would be in the village now, when the telephone rang, and she jumped nervously.

She and Lizzie and Tom were down on the Lake shore, with the children, but the clear trilling of the little bell reached them, and the cook's loud summons, "Telfome ling!" left Kate in no doubt. She handed Lizzie the baby, and ran into the house.

A few minutes later she came flying out again, and Lizzie got to her feet and screamed when she saw her face.

"Quick, Tom!" cried Kate. "There's been an accident! John's all right, but Mart—they think he's under the car! Take the big car—that man fixed her—and go as fast as you can! My gracious—my gracious——"

"Mart!" Lizzie screamed.

"They don't know—they don't know——" Kate said, breathless and distracted. "John's all right, it was John I talked to! It's down by the old mill, Tom; you're to pick John up there—the car's turned upside down in the gully. Lizzie, you poor child you," Kate said, frantically, as they all ran toward the garage to expedite Tom's start, "you've got your sign now!"

"Oh, my God—oh, my God!" Lizzie whispered. She had turned deathly white. Kate handed the baby to the nurse, and just in time, for as Tom swept down the road Martin's wife quietly fainted.

She was conscious again when the men returned, fifteen minutes later, but as Martin came with the others into the sitting room where she lay, she became faint again, and their laughing and crying explanations found her weak and bewildered, clinging to Martin's square, hairy hand, and alternating between tears and a weak sort of shaken laughter.

"I wasn't in the car at all!" Martin explained over and over. "I'd gotten out, in the village, to get some cigarettes, and I thought of *course* John knew I wasn't in the back seat!"

"I came out of the post-office and climbed in, and drove off,

thinking he was in the back seat!" John added. "I even spoke to him. I said 'All right, Mart?'"

Lizzie laughed faintly, hysterically, and the old grandmother gave a loud crow, and clapped her brown old hands.

"Then, when I got up to the mill," John pursued, "she skidded badly in the dust. I shouted to Mart, jumped free, and the next I knew she was upside down in the ditch!"

"Not upside down, exactly, sort of on her side, and tipped," Tom amended.

"I ran in to the power station," John added, "and telephoned Kate, and I'm afraid I scared her unnecessarily, and poor Lizzie too."

"To have *you* worked up and excited, old sobersides!" Mart said, affectionately to John.

"Well, I confess I lost my head!" John admitted.

"I don't blame you, John, it was a terrible scare for you!" Lizzie said, loyally. Everybody had ginger-ale, the little boys stumbled about with glasses, and there was a full hour of scattered and excited conversation about "the accident" before Kate could follow her husband into their room and shut the door.

John, who looked tired, grimy, and white, then displayed, almost for the first time in her knowledge of him, a certain sulkiness.

"You did it beautifully!" Kate assured him, enthusiastically, with an embrace.

"Yes, and some time you'll get caught with the goods, and then you won't feel so smart!" John answered her darkly.

"Oh, well, I won't mind," she said, with a dreamy look. "But, John, it was *wonderful*," Kate resumed, in deep admiration.

"You know I don't think you have any business to let me in for a thing like this!" John reminded her, resentfully.

"I know you don't, darling," his wife agreed, serenely. "And I say that I think you were a little angel to do it, and so you were!"

"I suppose the wreckers that came up after the Ford will spread it in the village that I came home drunk. Nobody but a fool

could have gone over that bank near the mill!" John said, bitterly.

"People go over everything, everywhere," Kate consoled him.

John, now in the soothing process of exchanging his city clothes for comfortable ranch garments, spoke next in a slightly mollified tone.

"What did you do to the big car?"

"Oh, I just opened the battery box, and jerked the connection loose, the man from the garage fixed her in five minutes," Kate said, glad to be even partially restored to favour. "Is the Ford a ruin, John?"

"No, she's hardly hurt. I drove her to the side of the road, opened the door, started her toward the bank and stepped out—that part was simple. But I'll swear," John added, scowling, "it made me sick, even though I knew it was a frame-up, to hear the glass and wood crash!" He towelled vigorously for a moment, regarding with disfavour his wife, who sat smiling, with absent eyes, in her favourite low rocker. "Is that a new dress?" he asked, in unwilling admiration of the bright head with its chestnut rings of hair, the flushed lovely face, and the thoughtful, black-fringed blue eyes. Kate was leaning back, the exquisite slenderness and firmness and roundness of her body was outlined against the white wicker; her slim ankles, in transparent brown silk, were crossed; her sturdy low shoes were square-toed, like those of a child.

She looked down at the well-washed creamy swiss that had been crimson, then pink, and would presently be white, and smiled.

"Not very!" she said. "Do you like it?"

"I like *you*," John said.

"I went out," said Kate, "and at the risk of Hong's sticking a knife into my back, made you cherry pies for dinner!"

"Yes," John conceded, reluctantly, "you can be cute about it, and act as if I was a kid of ten, but just the same you'll be caught with the goods, some day, playing Providence! You've made poor Lizzie think that she's had a sign straight from God."

"Well, and how do you know she hasn't, darling?" Kate said,

lovingly, now on the arm of his chair, with one arm about his neck. "It's all done for love, John, and you can't get away from that! Here's poor, superstitious Lizzie bound by a silly old vow she had no right to make. Here's darling old Uncle Peter mourning around and saying that although he had four sons there'll never be a Cunningham grandson! Here's Mart married to a wife that's no wife at all, and both of them unhappy. How do you know they didn't come here to me, as a sign from God, and how do you know that the idea of all this didn't come to me as another sign from God? I don't know why God need always send the Angel Gabriel or a thunderbolt! Love is always working miracles. What's an old Ford——"

"An old Ford?" John demanded. "I might have gone over the bank with it! Lizzie might have died of the shock. I tell you I felt rotten when I saw poor Tom racketing down the road to the rescue, in the big car."

"As for Lizzie, the jolt was good for her," Kate said, unsympathetically; "and Tom Cunningham's getting a regular Walsh smugness where everything except his own comfort is concerned! Aunt Mollie babies the life out of him. He talks to me by the hour about the advantages of staying single, and what fools people are to let themselves in for housekeeping and children. A good scare won't hurt him. Cheer up, John, you've done your part gloriously, and now you watch me do mine. Come on out now, and play with your baby, she's gotten so she misses you! She raises up her little head whenever she hears a car coming up the road—she looks too cunning!"

Some hours later Kate entered, after an unanswered knock, the guest bedroom where Lizzie was installed. Kate was in the old blue wrapper against which the sleeplessness and woes of four little Kellys had been soothed, for seven long years, her glorious hair hung in braids upon her shoulders.

Lizzie wore her nightgown, with a silk kimono over it. Her own hair was braided, and oddly becoming so; she looked young. She jumped nervously when Kate came in.

"Lizzie," Kate said, simply, "where's Mart?"

"Well, I suppose he's gone up to his little cabin," Lizzie answered, breathlessly. "When I left the sitting room he was talking to John!"

Kate sat down, regarding her steadily.

"Do you, or don't you, take what happened to-day as a sign?" she asked, after an uncomfortable silence.

"Well, yes, I do," Lizzie admitted. "Not but what cars are turning upside down on the roads every Saturday and Sunday the season through," she added, in an apologetic tone. "But still, I know what you mean, Kate, and of course it does seem so. But I felt that maybe, after a while, I'd tell Mart about our novena——"

Kate rose.

"I really thought you had some conscientious scruples about the whole thing, Lizzie," she said, coldly; "and that was why I suggested prayer. But I see now that it's your own stubbornness and conceit that have gotten you. Now," Kate added, as Lizzie shrank back and covered her face with her hands; "now, I'm done with you, my dear, and I'll tell you why. You took a solemn marriage oath two years ago, and then got out of it by working on Mart's sympathies, pretending that you didn't know anything about marriage! Now you've asked for a sign from God, and you've gotten it, and you admit that you adore Martin, and that he loves you, and here you are—quibbling again! Just one word more," Kate finished, magnificently. "You've had your own way so far, and you'll probably have it still! But you've been wretchedly unhappy and you'll go on being so. A curse will follow you, because the real person you're pleasing is the devil—the devil of stubbornness and pride, and the sort of mind that makes the good, pure things of life dirty! Personally," added Kate, "I'll never speak to you again—I wouldn't dare. You've broken two solemn oaths that I know of——"

"Kate," Lizzie whispered, ashen now, and clawing blindly at the other woman's shoulders. "Don't talk so! God knows I never meant to break my oath. I've known I wasn't going right, because of the sorrow in my heart——"

Kate caught at her hands, turned toward the door, opened it to the solemn mountain night that was cold and furry in the clear moonlight.

An arm of the screened porch ran out against the garden; the grapevines threw a rich mantilla of lace upon the drive; the tops of the trees rose in solemn spires above the Lake toward the steady bright throbbing of the stars. Some twenty yards away, with its square window showing a pink glow of light, among the low branches of the pines, was the log-cabin where Martin slept.

"Go up there," Kate directed Lizzie, briefly. "You're in God's hands now. You asked for guidance, and you've gotten it. You'll never have a happy moment if you disobey the sign."

"What'll I say?" Lizzie asked, returning after one brave step.

"Say? Oh, anything," Kate said, feeling that if she did not immediately cry she would immediately laugh. "Tell him your clock's stopped! Ask him if he has the right time."

Lizzie made a brief sound between a hysterical laugh and a sob, and Kate kissed her. Then Lizzie went slowly but unhesitatingly up the dark path, and Kate heard a dog rouse, and saw the Airedale come about the house and join her, and heard Lizzie speak to him.

The cabin door opened, and both Lizzie and Mart were silhouetted against the pink light for a moment. Then Lizzie went in, and the door closed.

Kate stood in the spare-room doorway, watching. Her face was stern, but it wore, too, an odd, an almost motherly smile. The light behind her was out, and she was entirely invisible in the darkness, staring idly at the moon-flooded night, the grapevines through which white beams pierced like streamers, the blooms of roses and syringa and Grandma's "Lady Washin'-tons" robbed of all colour, and pallid in the heavy dews.

"If that cabin door opens," Kate said, almost aloud, "I'm done with Lizzie Cunningham for life!"

But the moments passed, passed, and the cabin door did not

open. The solemn stars throbbed, the moon freed herself from the tree-tops and drifted clear of the clouds. Night noises, the woodeny creak of an owl, the crackle of a twig, sounded in the deep woods.

And presently the light in Mart's cabin went out.

CHAPTER XXX

IN THE quiet sunshine of the mornings Mollie and Allie went to church together, and afterward to market, reaching the big Howard Street house for luncheon. Very often nowadays Charley Walsh came up to luncheon, for his incredibly shrunken old mother lived with Mollie and Peter now, comfortably installed in what had been Ellen's room with Cecilia years ago. Maggie spent the larger part of her time in Portland, Oregon, where Harry had at last found a job and employers adapted to his peculiar needs, where his periodic absences were overlooked, and his patient and underpaid services reaccepted after the inevitable interval of rest and recuperation.

Harry had an agency for a remarkable tonic called "Earthvim." Two or three times a year his sales fell off completely, because of what Maggie always mentioned reluctantly as his delicate stomach, but during his normal periods he did well, "because he's so gentlemanly," said Maggie. His mother and sisters suspected designs upon Harry, on the part of an overblown grass-widow, and hence Maggie was always glad to be with him, keeping his house, and warning him against entangling alliances.

At other times she was with Mollie, and when Charley drifted in to lunch, as he frequently did, even when his advice or services were not needed in Tom's behalf, they always fell to talking of the "children": Cecy's strange, almost insulting, content in her quiet convent walls; Peter's reliance upon Mart and his injustice to Tom; Ellen's social successes. With the events in the Prendergast, Lynch, Crowley, Cudahy, and Riordan families to review, the horror of Dick Dimond's career, the changes, births, deaths, illnesses there was never any lack of material; indeed Mollie and Maggie would often talk on deep into the night,

rubbing cold bare toes with the sole of a cold bare foot, yawning, sniffing, yet talking on and on.

They praised all the children: Cecy was a saint; Ellen was said to be one of the most popular women in society; Mart had never given any one the taste of shame in his life, as his grandmother expressed it, and Kate, it was generally conceded, was unique. Her simple goodness, her happy motherhood, her hospitality, charity, gaiety, would, to quote the same authority, "have set up two of her. Kate," said her grandmother, impressively, "was one that glory would never die on."

But Tom was their darling. His very frailty only made him dearer. That once in every month or six weeks, or, at longest, once in every two months, he subjected them all to a day or two of dark and troubled moods, disappeared, caused them another twenty-four or forty-eight hours of acute anxiety and uncertainty, and was then deposited, sick in soul and body, in his own big bed, to be comforted and encouraged back to health and sanity again, drew him close to them all. He was like a baby, they knew that he needed them. Not by a hint, not by a glance, was Tom ever rebuked, unless sometimes he caught a glimpse of his mother's reddened eyes, or connected the pallor of Maggie and Allie with their midnight prayers for his welfare.

And between times he was able to repay them all. He teased them, he sang to them, he amused them with the hundred little stories that such a nature as Tom's gathers upon its daily round. They laughed themselves into tears at him; even his father, stocky, florid, very grey now, shook with silent mirth at this eldest son's spirited description of the simplest event.

Tom knew everybody, was at home everywhere. He could talk of the boxing ring and fascinate them. He drifted in and out of the night courts, knew judges and policemen intimately, described scenes in the emergency hospital that made the women draw quick breaths. He told them about the drug trade; they exchanged scandalized glances.

"If you'd only been here last night, Kate," Maggie would say to her niece. "Tom got goin'—you never heard the like!" And Kate felt she could forgive the ne'er-do-weel cousin a good

deal when she saw Peter getting out the domino table before dinner.

"Feel like a little game after dinner, Tom?"

"I suppose you call that pathetic attempt you make a game, do you, Pop? It looks to me like a kid playing blocks!"

"All right, young feller me lad, maybe you won't cock yourself up so much after a game or two."

"I'll take a couple of dollars off you, Cunningham," Tom would assure his father, good-naturedly. He was almost always good-natured, and when he was not, it was always the "dengy fever" coming on him, the women said.

And after all, it would have been a lonesome house without him. Big, empty rooms, the old nursery, Paul's old room, the "girls' room." Silence, rep curtains, stuffed chairs, drawn shades, and Grace Nolan announcing meals to which only elderly, grey, wrinkled women, and one old man gathered. Grandma rarely got downstairs, she tottered about the middle floor contentedly, rattling her old Crozier beads in the chapel, basking huddled up with a little knitted shoulder-shawl about her, in the streaming winter sunshine in Paul's room, listening like a blinking old brown owl to Mollie and Lizzie and Maggie, and sometimes weeping a little over Kate.

"Is he good to you, Katie?" she would ask, clinging to the strong young arm, and patting it with little strokes.

"Who? John Kelly? He'd better be!" Kate would answer, hardily. "I'll bump his head against a wall and drag—no, but look what he gave me!" she might break off, displaying the new furs, the new ring.

"That's right, dear. You tell him Grandma said he was always to be kind to you!" the old woman would falter, smiling through tears.

One bitter winter afternoon Kate chanced to stop in for a brief call, to find unusual stir and happiness in the old house. Ellen had come in from Burlingame, with the children, to spend the night!

Mollie and Peter had not seen their youngest daughter for actual months; Ellen occasionally telephoned, and said with

great warmth that she was going to "run out" to see them, immediately, but she never came. She was the happy, occupied wife of a fashionable physician now, with a cottage at Pebble Beach, and an interest in the amateur golf championship. Mollie had fretted for years over the casualness of Ellen's motherhood, but Ellen was strangely impervious to suggestion. She accepted advice from no one. She and Robert had left their three little girls with good nurses, and departed to Germany for a year's research work some time ago, and although Mollie had gone sometimes to sit in their model nursery with her baby granddaughters, and had found nothing actually amiss, she had grieved over them bitterly.

But now Rob had started for Los Angeles to attend a conference, and Ellen said that somehow she had felt homesick for Mama. So here they all were, and Mollie was ecstatically happy padding about making them welcome, putting an extra cot in the old nursery for the smallest girl, bustling, adding her own happy voice to the babel of voices.

Kate had two of her own children with her: her namesake, now rosy and strong, and the first-born, a tall, freckled, shyly smiling boy with missing front teeth, who delightedly marshalled his own small sister and the little Costellos into the first noisy childish game that had echoed in the big rooms for many years.

"Mart's comin' to dinner with Lizzie, and won't he be tickled?" Maggie commented, delightedly, as Peter came in, to be kissed with all her old affection by Ellen, and regard his granddaughters with shining old blue eyes. Mart and Lizzie lived across the bay now, and were rarely away from home at night.

"Well, then, I'm going to telephone John, and we'll stay, too," Kate stated, firmly, and felt a little twinge of heartache at beholding her uncle's look of deep satisfaction.

"Do that, Kate. That's what the big place is for!" said Peter, eagerly, clumsily puttering about in his desire to prove how welcome they were.

Mollie sent a careful message to the kitchen, to which was returned a hospitable answer that sure, everything would be grand, would Mr. Cunningham but serve the creamed crab rather light,

for there was lashings of beef, and leave them wait a little later, so that Nelly could run them together some biscuit and make another corn pudding on them.

Trays came upstairs, in the dear old way, for the children; beds were turned down; the Costello children's beautiful little nightwear was brought to light. Their small cousins were sent home after the upstairs nursery supper; John came in Kate's car, and Mart; Tom came home; laughter and footsteps rang in the hallways.

"Oh, this is the way it ought to be!" said Mollie, when Lizzie and Kate, Ellen and Maggie, she and Allie, and the old grandmother, were holding a sort of upstairs caucus before dinner.

She had been a critical and captious grandmother a few years ago; Ellen headstrong and resentful of suggestion. But both were changed now. Ellen's first flare of independence had faded into something more rational; Mollie's loneliness had taught her a lesson.

Ellen asked her mother, in an undertone, if she thought there was anything in the old theory that children might just as well have nursery diseases and get over them? Mollie was heard to admire the perfect physical condition of Patricia, Virginia, and Marie Therese Costello, and to say that she, for one, couldn't tell how children could be took through a whole winter without a sneeze.

"Mine would always have colds come Thanksgiving," admitted Mollie. "Not serious, although Daisy started with nothin' more than a heavy cold!"

"May Kennedy's boy turned black on her, and had one convulsion after another," Maggie was beginning, when her mother, who was slightly deaf, said clearly, to Lizzie, "Well, I guess you've got your girl now!"

"Oh, ~~Lord bless us,~~ I hope so!" Lizzie said, with a happy smile and a deep sigh. "Mart says he'll send another boy out to Father Crowley! Oh, they're the death of me, the three of them, and when I think what four would be!" Lizzie, whose favourite topic was young Martin, Paul, and Peter Cunningham, said with the air of a contented martyr. "Mart came in yes-

terday, and weren't all of them under the sofa, and he and I sat down, to have a little talk, and the first thing we knew——"

"I suppose I ought to have a boy, for Rob!" Ellen said, unguardedly, and there was a moment of constrained silence. To all the other women the thought of any predetermination where the souls of children were concerned was horrifying.

"Marie Therese," Ellen realizing that she had made a mistake, said with an uneasy laugh, "is almost five, and it would seem terribly funny to be in for the whole thing over again. But Doctor Costello is mad to have a son."

"They're both nice—boys and girls," said Kate's rich voice, slowly. Mollie glanced at her significantly, and the look of both mothers met through a quick film of tears.

"It's hard to bury them, dear, isn't it?" Mollie said then, softly.

"Oh, Aunt Mollie! No matter how little they are," Kate answered, a little huskily. "And he was so strong, one of the biggest babies I ever had—not like Kit, who was such a pale little scrap! And I was so well," she added, with trembling lips, "and so proud! I said to John, he came flying in, you know, 'Here's a caller for you, Mr. Kelly, who weighs in at nine pounds!' I thought *then* he looked peculiar, sad, not as he should have looked."

"Never mind, Katie," Lizzie said, tenderly, "you still have five darlings left!"

"Comma, as Tom says," Ellen added, and they all laughed.

"Kate," said Lizzie, when they were going downstairs a few minutes later, as some little lingering instinct of shame occasionally urged her to say, "you know that old foolishness of mine? Well, I would have got over it gradually, by myself, in a few months more——"

"Oh, certainly you would, Lizzie!" Kate said, warmly.

"Any woman who would put a good husband through the Purgatory I put Mart would be actually sinful, unless it was only for a short time," added Lizzie.

"Well, of course!"

"It was this," said Lizzie; "that my mother, God rest her,

never talked to me, and everything I got, I got out of books, do you see? or from the life of this saint or that——"

"I know!" Kate agreed, kindly. "But you and Mart Cunningham can thank me for your married happiness and your three fine boys," she added, in her soul, with a sort of spiritual laughter deep within her.

When Lizzie passed her, she found Ellen's arm about her waist, on the broad old stairway.

"Kate, they love this so, doesn't it make you feel ashamed?" Ellen said. "We ought to do it once a week!"

"I wish we could do it once a month," Kate suggested.

"Oh, do let's!" urged Ellen, in the old schoolgirl way. "And if they go up to camp this year," she added, "I'm going up for a week or two, with the girls—I really mean it!"

"You'll be only a few miles away from me, you know," Kate reminded her, approvingly. But she knew that Ellen would not do either thing. Life had carried Ellen away from Peter and Mollie for ever, and to Ellen's children Grandma and Grandpa would be only hazy, amiable figures seen at long and irregular intervals, having nothing actually to do with Patricia, Virginia, and Marie Therese.

Yet Ellen's heart ached with a sort of homesickness to-night. Her wealth and social success, her exacting and adoring husband usually satisfied her. But of late Rob's radical handling of certain domestic matters had somewhat alarmed Ellen, and to-night back in the old atmosphere she felt a great rest, a sort of spiritual ease, in her soul.

Rob reasoned, and logically enough, that there was no fundamental cause for all this sentimental love between parents and children, and Rob, cutting as cleanly through all Ellen's preconceived ideas as his scalpel might cut through living tissues, had said that when his girls were older they need never feel obliged to show any filial devotion or duty toward *him*.

That was sufficiently iconoclastic, but there was more. Rob's one idle morning was Sunday morning, and of late years he had not only entirely omitted church-going, but he had been annoyed if Ellen absented herself because of spiritual duties. If

one of his daughters babbled to him cheerfully of Purgatory or original sin, Rob of late had assumed a slightly impatient air.

"If the nuns are going to make bigots of them, put them in some other school," Rob commanded his wife.

"Oh, Rob, the Catechism isn't bigotry!" Ellen was even a little frightened. Where would all this end? Pat and Jinny and the baby must have their little serge uniforms, their processional veils, their dear familiarity with the black-clad sisters, the echoing clean big halls of the convent, the chapel streaming with sunlight and candlelight for Benediction.

Her faith had always been to Ellen the safe harbour to which every thought and act of childhood returned; the ultimate topic in all the long conversations between mother and aunts. And strongly implanted in her as it was, it alarmed her to feel that Rob, with his own peculiar theory of ethics, his conviction that surgeons like himself must do everything possible for every wrecked and crippled body, because there was no such thing as a soul, Rob possessed over her a stronger influence still.

Ellen did what thousands of young mothers do: kept the surface as serene as she could, assuming when with Kate or her mother that she and Rob were still "practical," ignoring the subject with Rob as much as possible, and trying not to feel too uncomfortable when a week-end visit carried them away from all church influences, and golf, gossip, and bridge filled every instant from Saturday to Monday.

To-night she determined that she would bring it all back, tell Rob once and for all that she was determined to see her own dear family constantly, and resume, to the last tiny obligation, all the practices of her faith.

But she knew, even now, that she would not. And Kate, touched by the radiance of Ellen's face, and the older faces, knew, too, that simple as it seemed, a family reunion like this one might not be managed again for another year—for several years.

Meanwhile, it was a happy hour. Ellen took the arm of her father's chair, and Peter put his arm about her, and now and then she laid her face against his, and kissed him in the old way. Tom was next his mother on the davenport, Kate and

John together, Mart sitting with his hand linked in Lizzie's somewhat bony, lifeless hand.

Grace Nolan came to the door, grey and spectacled now, to say, "Dinner is served when you are them new shades never come, Mr. Cunningham," much as she had said it for so many years, and Kate saw in the dining room the old high chair that had been Daisy's and then Paul's and then empty for so many years, and the old clock, punctually swinging, and the big looped red curtains, and the display of silver on the sideboard.

Afterward they went back to the fire again, and looked up at the old faded family pictures: Mollie bustled and crimped in her wedding dress; Mollie pressing a firm young cheek against the lumpy, expressionless face of a new baby in flowing embroideries; little Tom freckled and long-legged; little Mart in a torn straw hat; Cousin Kate snapped while visiting them, up at the Lake, and getting them all into trouble.

"That was the year Ellen was the baby, Papa, do you remember? When Tom cut Cecy's face open——"

"For heaven's sake let bygones be bygones, Mollie!" begged Tom.

"Oh, will you ever forget that?" This was Allie. "When I seen the blood streamin' over the poor child——"

"Cecy doesn't show it now," Kate commented. "My, but she is the happy-looking mortal! We went over on Sunday with all the children."

"What did you think of it?" Peter asked.

"Of little Daisy's memorial? It's just too beautiful! It's filled, you know, and the girls were swimming. Ellen, have you *seen* the swimming-pool Uncle Peter gave them, for Daisy?" Kate demanded. "The gymnasium is for Paul, and the pool has 'In memory of Margaret Cunningham, three years old' cut over the arch; it's perfectly exquisite."

"I wanted to have the dates, but they talked me out of it," said Mollie. "Born, November first—it was All Saints' Day, and I well recollect I couldn't get to Mass. Mother O'Birne came in to see me, when Daisy was only a few days old, and she says, 'Well, Mary—' for she was one would never nickname the

name of Mary. She used to say she had no patience with the Mollies and Minnies and Mays—'No,' she'd say, 'it's the grandest name of all, didn't our Lord choose it for His own mother, and are you girls too proud?' she'd tell the lot of us—May Hanna and Minnie Harrington and quite a crowd of us used to go to old St. Rose's."

"Where is it?" Ellen asked Kate.

"Well, you cross the tennis-courts at the back, and go up——"

"I must go over, and take the girls to see Aunt Cecy," Ellen murmured.

"Oh, do go! You'll have a lovely day!"

"And is Cecy happy?"

"Happy? She's turning into one of those wonderful nuns, you know, with the matchless skin, and starry eyes, and a sort of mysterious smile. She lives for those novices of hers, and I gather that they idolize her."

"I always hoped she'd be a nun, she was marked for it," said Mollie. "My oldest daughter I made a sacrifice——"

"Heroic!" breathed Kate, thinking of the rosy little girl with the bobbed curly hair who had been her baby Rosemary a few brief years ago.

"You make a nun of either one of our girls, and you'll do well, Kate," John Kelly said, smiling at his wife. "I never saw such a bunch of wild Indians—I don't know which are the worst, the girls or the boys! That Kit of ours hangs her head, and looks up under her yellow hair as if she was shy, but she'll give them all cards and spades."

"That's Kate here to the life," Maggie Walsh said. "You'd think she was a little saint, when she was a child, smilin' at you. And all the while some deviltry you'd want to skin her for——"

"But you never *did* skin me," Kate said in an undertone, her luminous beautiful eyes upon her aunt. And she thought of the old Turk Street cottage, the fog moving mysteriously among Grandma's Lady Washin'tons, the shabby odorous kitchen, the cold bedrooms where sick uncles moaned and tossed, and, moving through it all, a silent little yellow-headed motherless girl,

watching, crying sometimes, worrying about the troubles of her elders as only a child can worry. That rice and potato saucepans were all always burned, and always smelled; that dish-towels were all always mud-coloured and soggy; that money was always lacking; that life was unfair, difficult, lachrymose; this had been the child's law.

She had grown tall, had somehow gotten through High School, walking home with her arms locked about Maysie Crowley's waist; she had "gone for bread," spongy bread wrapped with breakable string, to the grocery that smelled so strongly of coffee and yellow soap; she had wept, protested, raged, over the same dented, iron-grey dish-pan and the same nicked cups, for years and years.

And ah, what visits to Aunt Mollie had meant then, visits to this same ugly, impressive house to which they all returned in charity, in condescension, now! To enter this big hall, to feel her shabby little shoes touching the heavy carpets, and see the light streaming upon the great staircase, Aunt Mollie prosperous, rustling in silk, Cecy's new clothes so wonderful, with their "Emporium" or "City of Paris" tags still dangling on them; how little Kate Walsh had loved to come to Aunt Mollie's, and how rarely it had been managed! Kate especially remembered the day of Daisy's funeral, when she and Tom had discovered bar chocolate in shiny white and gold paper, in some big storeroom downstairs, and had taken all they could find, just before being assigned their places in the carriages.

"Oh, Mollie, God knows it's hard to bury them!" Grandma had said, and Kate, at nine, had innocently wondered what made it so. She had quite simply buried dolls and dead birds many a time!

"What was it, Aunt Mollie?" she came out of a dream. Mollie had addressed her.

"I was only saying, Kate, that now's the happiest time for you and John. When they're little, when they're all about you, with their lessons and their skates——"

"And John and I are always saying that we'll thank God when we get the crowd of them raised!" Kate said, with a laugh.

"The minute they're raised, you lose them," Mollie assured her, sighing. Ellen, listening, dropped her face against her father's forehead, and he tightened his arm about her. So she had jealously entrenched herself a thousand times in her stormy babyhood, but it was many years now since Peter had felt the dearly loved weight against him and heard the imperious young voice so close, so confidential, in his ear.

To honour the great occasion, the old grandmother had been half guided, half carried downstairs, and was now ensconced in an armchair so deep that only her lean little brown claws and the purple and black crocheted cap that covered her bald little head were visible at a casual glance. When her children or grandchildren spoke, her sharp little eyes moved shrewdly from face to face, and occasionally the sound of a goblin chuckle issued from her neighbourhood.

But she spoke little herself. She stared at the fire, and her dreams went back—back across the sunshiny years that had brought a barefoot peasant girl from a sod cabin smoked by a thousand peat-fires to a mansion in the old Mission of San Francisco.

Again the cackle and confusion of a Kerry market-day, the shawls, the women bundled into strange mysterious garments to be known all their lives simply as "me cloes," gossiping in the cool Irish sunshine. Again the big ship, the strange food, the clean blue ocean racing tirelessly past the brass-topped rail; heavy rains, when everyone was cooped below stairs, winter sunshine again, when they gathered on deck, and watched the rising towers of the New World swim into the pale blue distance. Brooklyn, and a policeman cousin who was paid—God love us, he never was paid twenty-five guineas a month?

Then a train, smelling of kerosene lamps and orange peels, for long dirty days of glare and dust, and then old San Francisco, with her grey wooden houses steeped in pale western sunshine upon her encircling hills, and gulls over the bay, and cable cars rattling up Market Street.

And then Tom Walsh, mad with joyous passion for her youth and sauciness and beauty. How his prosperity had scared her,

a feller that owned two cottages on Turk Street and was going into the livery business for himself at twenty-five!

How happy, how happy those old simple days had been! Days before the "incandescent light," and the telephone, and the "horseless carriage"! Days before reinforced concrete and moving pictures and Victrolas and gas stoves!

The sidewalks of wood, the streets rounded cobbles, a trip to Oakland, or an afternoon listening to the band in the Park a real holiday. She and Tom, and with them little Charley and Harry, in their decent black stockings and polished shoes, with blue ribbons on their straw hats, and anchors printed on their clean shirts, and Maggie and Mollie in petticoats three deep, and heavy starched white dresses, and flowered "chips," what happy innocent expeditions were theirs!

Widowhood. Hard times. Another husband, again a Walsh, and the new baby Robbie, and then widowhood and hard times again. There had been happiness in all this, too. But not like that earlier gay happiness, of the ship and the blue water, of Tom Walsh murmuring absurdities in her flattered young ear, of her first squirming, sturdy little baby.

And then Mollie's brilliant marriage, to a rich man, Mollie's fine babies, Mollie's griefs and joys.

"Well, my own weren't perfect," mused the old lady. "But Mollie's been a good daughter, and poor Mag's a saint. Charley and Harry has their faults, but there's a lot of good in the both of them. Leave us see how much better Mollie's lot turns out—or Katie's!"

Harry had sent her the heavy lengths of the black silk she wore. Maggie had made it. Where would Pete's Tom be if it wasn't that Charley was so good-natured, and so providentially equipped, to be his guide in his darker hours; and was there ever a more successful daughter than Mollie?

At the end of more than sixty years of wifehood the old woman looked back upon life without resentment or regret. It might have been better, but God knows, she mused piously, it might have been worse!

Mollie's wandering thought followed somewhat the same

lines. She dreamed of little Daisy, of little George, of Paul, her three angels, safe beyond the reach of hurt and sin for ever. Never to be disillusioned, to be blamed, to be chilled and saddened in life. Never to be "made nothin' of", as handsome brilliant Tom was, by his father and brother, to be childless and wifeless all his days because of his one forgivable and only occasional weakness! Never to turn cold to his father and mother, as Ellen had; never to wed a stick, like Martin's Lizzie. And as for Cecy, Mollie gave an almost audible sniff when her thoughts reached her. All very well to betake yourself and your problems to a cloister, but that wasn't life! A fine world it'd be if everyone was to be afraid of living in it!

Mollie thought of her early pride as a rich beloved young wife in her beautiful group, the handsome boys, the lovely little girls, the adorable white-caped, innocent babies, and her heart ached hard and heavily. She did not remember all her strangely shortsighted, strangely changeable prayers for them, nor that some of the most earnest of these had been answered, to her own agony and despair. She was content to say sadly that God knew best, life was only meant to be a "trile" to the poor pilgrims struggling on the hard way of the Cross.

And she looked at Kate's happy, unconscious face, Kate, whose problems were all of little flannels, bottles, bumps, arithmetic, and coasters. "Life'll learn her," Mollie reflected, without malice, yet in a deep and obscure satisfaction. "What say, dear?" she added, aloud, realizing that Tom had spoken to her.

"I asked you if, on the whole, you liked us, Mollie?"

"I was just thinkin' of the plans we had for the crowd of you," Mollie said, rousing. "There's not one of you done what we thought you would!

"It was always my hope—wasn't it, Pete?—that Tom here would marry and give us a houseful of children," Mollie went on, believing her own words. "And there was a time when it seemed as if it might be you, Kate. But it wasn't God's will, for all our prayers!"

"Never mind, I have my grandsons," Peter said, contentedly, with a proud look at Mart. "Jim Riordan was speakin' to me

but a day or two ago about it. He's a great fan for Mart here, and he says, 'We'll have another Peter Cunningham in here before you drop out, Pete! There's few,' he says, 'that can look to having grandsons take their places, in these days of dear-knows-what and divorces and all the rest of it,' he says."

"It's little Mart has the head for figures on him," Lizzie, always eager to speak of her sons, put in. "Yesterday I was 'phoning the grocer——"

"I don't like you to talk as if you hadn't *two* sons in the business, Pete," Mollie gently chided her husband, when some nursery anecdotes had been exchanged.

"Certainly I'm in the business," Tom said, promptly. "I'm in it in an advisory capacity. I go into Pop's office, and he advises me, and there you are!"

"The other day——" Mart's undertone paused, and he looked about the circle with a smile. "Go on talking!" he commanded them, and then, addressing them all, with a smile: "Well, all right, all listen. I was just going to tell Kate that when we moved to Mill Valley, Lizzie and I were going over old boxes and things, and we came across 'Holy Joe'—Paul's little old 'Holy Joe.' Do you remember, Kate?"

"Do I remember?" There were tears in more eyes than the blue ones she turned on him. "Darling that he was," she said, in a low tone. And she seemed to see Paul again, with his triangular pale, radiant little face against the pillows, and hear again his high exulting voice ringing through the big house: "Mart! Come up! Holy Joe——!"

Perhaps they were all taken back to the days when the long fight for Paul's life had absorbed all the vitality, all the interest and love of the big household. A silence fell. Then Ellen said drowsily:

"I'm having a good time!"

"Well," Mollie said, rousing herself from deep thought, and furtively wiping her wet eyes, "one thing we never done was push any one of you! We gave you your faith and your health and let you go your own ways!"

"There was never one of you infloo'nced by us!" Peter added.

"You've made your mistakes and had your triles, but me and Mama has done no more than stand back and watch you!"

"I don't think any one of us is much to write home about," Tom commented, frankly.

"Cecy's Mistress of Novices," Kate reminded him; "Ellen's husband is at the head of his profession; Mart's second vice-president of a big business, and Tom," she ended her summary prettily, "is the darling of all hearts, and is now about to sing to us——"

"Accompanied by the gifted Mrs. Jawn Rose Kelly. The piano has been kindly loaned by the late Miss Mary Walsh, of Turk Street," said Tom.

"No life is absolutely happy," Ellen added, as they laughed. "Sometimes the richest people are absolutely the wretchedest!"

"It isn't to be, in this world," Maggie said, firmly.

"We're all too rich," Kate contributed, animatedly. Only two generations away from the poverty of a sod cabin, she had come far enough to learn this incredible thing. "Honestly, that's it, Uncle Peter," she added, seriously, as everyone exclaimed derisively. "If you were just a fairly successful grocer in the Mission here, and all of us working people, we'd be at home here every Sunday night, and Aunt Mollie would cook the dinner. Money separates people—there's no help for it. I hope my kids will be poor!"

"Don't say that, Kate, for it means the roon of us all!" Mollie said instinctively, humorously, yet half seriously.

"I wish our grandparents had all been perfect," Kate went on, whimsically.

"What good would that do us?" Mollie asked.

"Well, we'd be better——" Kate began, vaguely, and stopped. She fell silent.

"Come on, Tom!" she broke into the pause, in a different tone, and rising, "let's all sing."

She went to the square piano, snapped on a great softly glowing lamp, began to rustle through piles of music.

Tom took his place behind her. He thought to himself that he could remember when Kate had been the prettiest girl—

absolutely the most beautiful girl!—of his acquaintance. He had felt very sentimental about her, in the old cousinly days when she used to fly laughing and giddy up to his room, and sit panting with Cecy on his couch, watching him put the final touches to his dressing for one of his mysteriously independent evenings. She had been ready to glow with the excitement over an evening at the Orpheum, then.

Now she was still "nice," beautiful eyes, colour still high, a few grey hairs in her early thirties, her old girlish coquetries gone for ever. Kate was matter-of-fact, merry, capable now; she still braided her splendid hair about her head, but with no particular concern for its appearance.

Well, it didn't matter, Tom thought. She would never look at another man than John, nor he at any other woman but his wife; John never really saw Kate, he saw the vague ideal of wife and saint he had made of her.

"Wonderful evening, Tommy?" she said.

"Awful!" he answered, captiously. "I feel ninety! We're all living in the past——"

"Well——" She smiled dreamily, willing to concede anything. "But we're pretty happy now," she protested. And in a lower tone she added: "*You're* happy, Tom?"

"I'll never have a wife, Katie," Tom said, "I'll never have a kid of my own——"

It wrung her heart. He felt a little pang of contempt, knowing that it would—that it had been said for that purpose. Kate, getting plainer, heavier, greyer every day, pitied only the men and women who had not her nursery! Bottles, blocks, cribs—Lord, Tom mused, by what alchemy was a high-spirited, beautiful woman brought to the point when these were all she needed for happiness!

Yet to-night he had truly felt an instant's pang, seeing his mother's pleasure in the coming back of the children, seeing that stout, short arm of his father's fitted about Ellen's slender, elegant waist. Nothing in life was particularly worth while. Maybe raising kids, working for them, loving them, came nearer than most things!

"We're a great lot, we Irish!" he said, adjusting the music rack.

"Do you ever wonder," her fingers were finding the chords. "Do you ever wonder what it would be like not to have a drop of Irish blood in your veins?"

"Oh, holy cats!" said Tom. "I'd rather be dead!"

"See if you can find the one 'Twas dyin' they thought her, and kindly they brought her to the banks of Milwater, where her forefathers lie,'" Maggie suggested.

"Can you beat it?" Tom murmured over Kate's shoulder. "Just to start the evening gaily——"

"Sing 'Silent, O Moyle——' That was the one Paul loved!" Mollie requested, with a deep sigh.

"There was a very pretty one about the man that come back home and found his wife had left him," Allie contributed, from her shadowy corner. "'The valley lay smilin' before me, as lately I left it behind, but I trembled and somethin' come o'er me——'"

"I shall have hysterics," Kate assured Tom, under cover of a rambling accompaniment. "All we need is 'Abide With Me.'"

She played "Drink to me only with thine eyes," and they all sang, and "Noel," whose glorious verses Tom sang alone, with all their voices chiming in on the chorus. And they sang "The Minstrel Boy," Peter crying quite openly, and smiling as he wiped his eyes.

"Land of Song!" said the warrior bard,
"Though all the world betrays thee,
One sword at least thy rights shall guard,
One faithful harp shall praise thee!"

"That feller could write," Peter commented, blowing his nose as the splendid echoes of Tom's big voice rang and lessened, and crept away, thinning exquisitely into silence.

They sang, "Sail, Baby, Sail," all together, and at "only don't forget to sail back again to me!" Mollie cried, too.

And to some of them, to Peter perhaps, to Kate, and to Martin, who oddly and unsuspectedly possessed the tenderest and most sentimental memories of them all, they might have been

children again, presently to be banished protesting to bed, life all unknown, and all ahead.

Tom might again have been the hope and pride of their hearts, handsome and bold at sixteen—at eighteen—at twenty; Cecy, demure and conscientious, might only have left the room for a moment, perhaps to accompany, in her old sisterly fashion, the tearful Paul up the long flight to bed; Ellen might have been her father's madcap, safe in sanctuary in his big gentle arm; and Martin, awkward and big and tousled, twisting about over his Latin lesson, and meditating as to the right phrases in which to acquaint his mother with some fresh schoolboy difficulties. Mollie might have asked, "How's your poison-oak, Baby?" or "Who bust Papa's towel-rack?" in just the same old way; Peter might have pleaded that he could not romp: "Papa's got a bone in his leg."

And little Kate, eager, shabby, weary, burdened with burdens, and the shadows of lives far beyond her understanding, might have come in wistfully to share an hour of all the Howard Street glory and the Cunningham felicity.

The dear, dear children, brown, lean, awkward, annoying, freckled and untidy, and gone for ever! And in their places these somewhat disillusioned, somewhat hardened, somewhat saddened men and women, so soon to be grey, to be feeble and alone, to vanish as completely as those same dear busy ignorant children had!

"Here's one—I always like this one," Kate said. And Tom's voice carried the words about the homely, handsome, heavily furnished old sitting room, with its photographs, its rep, its majolica and onyx, its cushions and tasselled foot-stools.

So all the little ships come sailing home across the sea,
Their voyage safely ended, their way they've wended
Home where they would be!
They sail across the bar where no storms are,
All dangers passed,
And two by two together,
Come safely home at last!

THE END

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